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**Groups' Tendency Towards Risk in  
International Political Decisions: The  
Impact Exerted By Risk In The  
Decision-Making Process Developed  
By Groups During International  
Crises**

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## ABSTRACT

Uno dei principi di base della democrazia è rappresentato dal fatto che i cittadini hanno il diritto di votare liberamente i propri rappresentanti. Ne consegue che in uno stato democratico, a differenza di uno totalitario in cui il potere è esercitato da una singola persona, le più importanti decisioni politiche vengono prese da gruppi di persone che collaborano nel tentativo di risolvere i principali problemi del paese a livello sia nazionale che internazionale. Infatti, nel momento in cui si verifica una crisi a livello globale, il governo, inteso come un insieme di persone che deve prendere decisioni adeguate al fine di garantire il benessere di tutti i cittadini presenti all'interno del territorio dello stato, assume un ruolo ancora più rilevante poiché la vita di miliardi di persone sia dentro che fuori dai confini nazionali dipende da loro. In questo contesto, però, il problema principale è rappresentato dal fatto che, in generale, quando un elemento più o meno elevato di rischio è coinvolto, prendere decisioni in gruppo diventa molto più complicato poiché elementi psicologici interagiscono con la situazione di crisi influenzando, in questo modo, il risultato finale.

Questa idea è stata ampiamente studiata e sviluppata nel corso degli anni da un gran numero di studiosi nel campo della psicologia politica, ossia la scienza che studia come la psicologia condiziona le decisioni politiche, e, di conseguenza, un'elevata mole di teorie al riguardo sono state create. Tra queste le più accreditate risultano essere la teoria della scelta razionale (rational choice theory), la teoria del prospetto (prospect theory) e la teoria dei modelli concettuali (three models theory). Esaminando più da vicino ciascuno di questi tre studi è interessante notare come, a livello cronologico, la teoria della scelta razionale sia stata la prima ad essere creata e anche quella che, per molti anni, è stata presa come punto di partenza per tutte le ricerche volte a spiegare il processo decisionale sviluppato dagli individui in situazioni di stress. In particolare, l'elemento principale su cui si basa questa teoria riguarda la razionalità delle persone nel momento in cui devono prendere importanti decisioni: essi, infatti, scelgono razionalmente l'alternativa che meglio riesce ad aumentare i loro ricavi diminuendo, al tempo stesso, i costi. La teoria del prospetto, al contrario, si basa principalmente sull'idea che le scelte compiute dagli individui, in genere, non sono molto razionali poiché le emozioni, le percezioni e il carattere di ogni singola persona, all'interno del processo decisionale, giocano un ruolo primario. I creatori di tale teoria, gli studiosi Kahneman e Tversky, erano infatti convinti del fatto che, in genere, quando una persona si trova in una posizione che lui/lei percepisce come positiva (domain of gains), suddetto individuo sarà meno disposto a correre rischi per cercare di ottenere risultati migliori. Al contrario, se la persona si trova in una posizione di perdita (domain of losses), lui/lei sarà più disposto a correre rischi per migliorare la sua situazione. Il punto debole di entrambe queste ricerche, però, consiste nel loro voler porre l'attenzione solamente alle

decisioni prese dai singoli individui in determinate situazioni di rischio che possono verificarsi nella vita di tutti i giorni, ad esempio quando si verificano problemi di salute o difficoltà economiche. Poche ricerche sono state condotte riguardanti l'applicazione di queste teorie alle decisioni prese da gruppi di persone, specialmente dai governi, in momenti di elevato rischio a livello internazionale. Tra queste, la teoria che sicuramente merita più attenzione poiché nel corso degli anni è stata ampiamente analizzata e riconosciuta da un elevato numero di ricercatori in tutto il mondo è la cosiddetta teoria dei modelli concettuali creata da Allison nel 1969. Essa si fonda sull'utilizzo di tre diversi modelli per l'analisi di crisi internazionali avvenute nel passato: in inglese essi sono stati denominati Rational Process Model (Modello I), Organizational Process Model (Modello II) e Bureaucratic Politics Model (Modello III). Ciascun modello possiede delle caratteristiche peculiari e ognuno di essi prende in considerazione aspetti ed elementi diversi che hanno l'abilità di influenzare le decisioni finali adottate dai governi in momenti di rischio: nel Modello I il livello di razionalità, nel Modello II il comportamento delle organizzazioni interne all'apparato governativo e, nel Modello III, le contrattazioni che avvengono tra i diversi individui che possono influenzare il risultato finale. Di conseguenza si può facilmente notare come questo livello sia stato creato su tre diversi livelli: il primo Modello analizza le mosse e contromosse dei governi, il Modello II prende in considerazione le organizzazioni e, infine, il terzo Modello riguarda gli individui.

Di conseguenza, uno degli scopi di questa tesi è quello di comparare queste tre teorie analizzandone i pregi e i difetti; l'attenzione però verrà posta non sulle decisioni prese individualmente ma sui gruppi e sulle dinamiche che da essi vengono, spesso involontariamente, create nel momento in cui devono cercare di risolvere una crisi internazionale. Infatti, in un gran numero di casi, la presenza di determinate idee, credenze, emozioni e anche il semplice desiderio umano di accettazione e appartenenza ad un gruppo sviluppati dai membri del governo in situazioni di pericolo hanno dato luogo a decisioni estremamente rischiose che, nel peggiore dei casi, hanno portato anche all'esplosione di terribili guerre. Alcuni chiari esempi di ciò sono la guerra del Vietnam negli anni '60 e '70 o, più recentemente, l'invasione dell'Iraq del 2003. D'altro canto, però, è importante tenere in considerazione che c'è stato anche un certo numero di situazioni in cui il gruppo decisionale ha lavorato in modo proficuo, vagliando tutti i costi e i rischi di ciascuna possibile alternativa giungendo, infine, allo sviluppo di una decisione ponderata e cauta. Una prova di questa idea può essere vista, ad esempio, nella crisi dei missili di Cuba del 1962 dove il governo statunitense ha preferito adottare una soluzione più cauta col fine di evitare lo scoppio di una guerra nucleare che avrebbe comportato la morte di migliaia di persone innocenti. Di conseguenza, è fondamentale cercare di capire il motivo per cui in alcuni casi le decisioni adottate dai governi sono rischiose mentre

in altri sono caute e quali sono gli elementi che, in genere, fanno propendere verso l'una o l'altra direzione. Per questa ragione è importante sottolineare che, all'interno di questa tesi, tre fenomeni sono stati individuati ed analizzati per spiegare questa differenza tra decisioni caute e rischiose. Essi, in inglese, vengono chiamati choice shift, group polarization e groupthink e risultano essere non solo le cause più accreditate dagli studiosi per spiegare il motivo di alcune decisioni pessime prese dai governi nel corso della storia ma anche quelli che si verificano più frequentemente durante le crisi internazionali. Essi, infatti, potrebbero essere visti come dei fenomeni che, in molti casi, si verificano proprio come conseguenza del semplice fatto che un elemento di rischio più o meno elevato è presente in un momento di incertezza a livello globale. Questa, perciò, è la motivazione principale per cui il loro impatto in situazioni di grande rischio non deve essere sottovalutato: infatti bisogna considerare che, nella maggioranza dei casi, è proprio il verificarsi di questi fenomeni che porta all'adozione di decisioni estremamente rischiose e potenzialmente disastrose.

In conclusione, grazie all'analisi delle tre teorie che ipotizzano come i governi prendono decisioni in momenti di stress, ossia la teoria della razionalità, del prospetto e dei modelli concettuali, e dei tre fenomeni che più frequentemente si verificano all'interno dei gruppi nei momenti di grave pericolo, ossia choice shift, group polarization e groupthink, sarà possibile avere un quadro più completo sul comportamento dei governi durante le crisi internazionali. Infatti, sviluppando una comprensione più ampia degli effetti che la presenza di un elemento di rischio può avere sulle decisioni politiche, sarà possibile prevedere come i governi dei paesi coinvolti in una particolare crisi decideranno di comportarsi e quali misure adotteranno nel tentativo di risolverla. In questo modo, con un po' di fortuna, in futuro forse sarà possibile anche prevenire lo scoppio di altre gravi crisi internazionali. In particolare, alcune importanti domande a questo riguardo riusciranno, all'interno di questa tesi, ad ottenere una risposta: a livello internazionale, perché i governi in alcuni casi sono disposti a mettere in atto soluzioni estremamente rischiose mentre, in altri casi, preferiscono delle soluzioni più caute? Quali sono gli elementi che in genere fanno propendere verso l'una o l'altra direzione? In generale, i gruppi tendono a adottare soluzioni più rischiose rispetto ai singoli individui?

Al fine di dare una risposta a queste domande, all'interno di questa tesi sono stati presi in considerazione ed analizzati due momenti storici di grande rilievo: la crisi missilistica di Cuba del 1962 e l'attacco a Pearl Harbor del 1941. Essi rappresentano due momenti catartici della storia contemporanea sia per le conseguenze che ne sono derivate sia per il livello di tensione che li ha preceduti. In particolare, queste due crisi internazionali sono interessanti poiché possiedono caratteristiche che sono, allo stesso tempo, molto simili e completamente differenti. Infatti, in entrambi i casi si parla di crisi che hanno sconvolto l'equilibrio geo-politico mondiale e i cui effetti

hanno avuto ripercussioni su miliardi di persone. Inoltre, sia nel 1941 che nel 1962 si può notare come le decisioni siano state prese da gruppi di persone più o meno numerosi che, in una situazione di enorme rischio, hanno collaborato per raggiungere una soluzione. In questo senso però è interessante sottolineare come la maggiore differenza tra queste due crisi stia proprio nel risultato finale: in un caso, infatti, il Giappone ha attaccato gli Stati Uniti e questo ha comportato l'ingresso degli americani nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale che, nell'agosto del 1945, hanno sganciato le due bombe atomiche che hanno portato alla distruzione di Hiroshima e Nagasaki. Al contrario, nel secondo caso, il Comitato Esecutivo e il presidente statunitense John Kennedy sono riusciti a trovare una soluzione di compromesso con il sovietico Khrushchev evitando, in tal modo, lo scoppio di una guerra nucleare che avrebbe comportato la morte di miliardi di persone. In generale, alcuni dei risultati più rilevanti che sono stati ottenuti da questo confronto riguardano il fatto che non ci sono prove per asserire che i gruppi tendono a prendere decisioni che sono più rischiose rispetto ai singoli individui. Infatti, come è stato possibile vedere grazie al caso della crisi missilistica di Cuba, i governi possono prendere anche decisioni più caute ma questo dipende da tutta una serie di fattori legati principalmente all'organizzazione dell'ambiente di lavoro, alla personalità e volontà dei singoli membri del gruppo, al ruolo esercitato dal leader e, infine, al contesto esteriore e alla cultura del paese coinvolto. Tutti questi elementi, infatti, sono risultati essere quelli che, secondo i maggiori studiosi in materia, hanno avuto un impatto maggiore nella creazione di una tale divergenza nei risultati finali durante queste due crisi internazionali. Inoltre, un secondo importante risultato consiste nel riconoscimento dei gruppi come organismi più complessi rispetto agli individui che, di conseguenza, prendono anche le loro decisioni seguendo un iter diverso e più elaborato.

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## INTRODUCTION

During history, when international crises have occurred, a primary role in their resolution has been played by the national governments of the countries involved. Consequently, still today, whether to adopt a peaceful or a violent resolution of an international problem depends totally on the decisions of the major political groups in charge. Therefore, in such a context, the most important element that has to be taken into consideration and analysed becomes the concept of risk and, in particular, how the presence of risk can influence groups' decisions. In fact, what can be noted is that, during international crises, the governments' are usually willing to undertake levels of risk which are different from those that would have been accepted by the single individuals. This, in turn, can contribute to influence the final outcomes developed by groups either in a positive or negative sense. Therefore, the understanding of governments' behaviours in situations of uncertainty becomes fundamental since that the well-being of millions of people depends on the outcomes derived from their decisions. However, this is not an easy task: indeed, due, in particular, to their compositions and to the mechanisms involved in the decision-making processes, groups are more complex actors compared to individuals. Consequently, a higher number of different elements and theories have to be considered in order to understand how governments take decisions in moments which involve a high level of risk and stress.

With the aim of explaining the decision-making process developed by the national governments in situations of risk, it is important to underline, first of all, the fact that a high number of scholars during history have created theories which defend the rationality of human beings. In this sense, the best and most famous example of this tendency can be seen in Von Neumann and Morgenstern's rational theory developed in 1947: according to them, when someone has to take an important decision, he/she does so by evaluating rationally all the costs and gains of every possible alternative. However, the main problem of all the theories which deal with rationality is that they do not manage to properly consider the role played by subjectivity. In fact, what can be noted is that subjectivity, defined as 'the unit between symbolical processes and emotions', can really be able to influence the decision-making process either in a good and in a bad way (González Rey, 2017, page 1). Indeed, it is worth to highlight that each decision-maker has, at the individual-level, his/her own desires, beliefs and ideas that, in turn, can influence his/her final decisions in a not so rational way. However, as it was said earlier, major political decisions today are taken by national governments, which are composed of groups of people, and not by single individuals. In this sense, if the group-level is considered, what is logic to assume is that the decision-making process becomes much more complicated since that a multitude of different ideas and desires have to be combined. Therefore,

what can be argued is that groups usually do not follow only rational reasonings when they take decisions since that they usually merge them with personal beliefs. Consequently, since the rational theories are not enough to properly explain why some decisions like the invasion of Iraq of 2003 were taken, different theories and phenomena have to be considered.

Accordingly, this is the main reason why Kahneman and Tversky's Prospect Theory and Allison's Three Models Theory have been created. In particular, one of the most interesting elements of these two theories regards the dichotomy between rationality and subjectivity. In fact, they believe that, when groups have to take decisions in moments of uncertainty, their rational reasonings are limited. Indeed, they all agree that emotions, beliefs, ideas and other psychological mechanisms, e.g., the leader's beliefs or the way in which the problem is presented, become powerful stimuli which are able to influence the decision-making process. For example, in many cases, being in a situation which involves a certain level of risk means that emotions such as fear or anxiety are at stake. In this case, due to the presence of these types of feelings, the groups' members become unable to evaluate rationally all the alternatives. For example, as Russett (1967) stated, 'The decision-maker may, because of high stress, fail to perceive information [...] that would otherwise be apparent' (page 89). Therefore, groups' members, in those cases, will choose the option that, according to them, will be more capable of reducing those negative feelings, even though it is not the option that, rationally, would have entailed the highest gains.

However, what can be said is that the real aim of both the Prospect theory and the three models theory is to try to understand how groups really take decisions during international crises and which are the elements that affect the final outcomes. What is relevant to say about these two theories is that, in order to answer to these questions, they adopt two different perspectives. In fact, on one hand, Kahneman and Tversky decided to use graphs and concepts such as reference point, framing or domain of losses/gains in order to understand how decisions are taken when both risk and emotions are involved. On the other hand, Allison started from the belief that today exist a 'large number of incomplete, unrelated, and perhaps even contradictory explanations' and that, therefore, it is necessary to create a better paradigm in order to explain why some international events like the Cuban Missile Crisis happened (Steiner, 1977, page 390). Consequently, he created three separate Models with three different levels of analysis: Model I, the Rationalist Policy Model, considers the international level, the Organizational Process Model (Model II) the organizational level and Model III, called Bureaucratic Politics Model, the individual level. In particular, he believed that, in order to create a more complete explanation concerning the influence exerted by risk in groups' decisions, these three Models have to be combined.



Moreover, in order to understand the behaviour of the governments during international crises, it is not enough to analyse the rational theory, the prospect theory and three models theory. In fact, it is important to consider even that, in situation of risk, other psychological mechanisms which have an impact in the final outcomes are usually develop among the group's members. In other words, what can be said is that these are elements which usually appear as a sort of consequence related to the mere presence of risk. Among them, the most accredited and recognized by scholars are the choice shift, the group polarization and the groupthink phenomena. In fact, the presence of one or more of these three elements can really affect a government's decision-making process, in either a good or a bad way. On many occasions, for instance, the government's members decided to adopt extremely risky solutions that they, at the individual-level, would have never been willing to accept in different circumstances. This is relevant because, in the most extreme cases, these types of bad and extremely risky decisions taken by governments due to the presence of one or more of these three phenomena had led to catastrophic wars and disastrous events. However, what can be seen is that, during history, some groups had managed to take even cautious decisions which permitted them to avoid disasters and to solve peacefully the dispute. Consequently, the main aim of this thesis will be to understand which is the influence exerted by risk in groups' decision-making processes and, in particular, if groups always become risk-taking actors during international crises. The understanding of this topic, in turn, is fundamental in order to highlight how groups really work, which are the elements that can push governments to adopt risky decisions which can compromise the lives of millions of people and, in general, why sometimes the outcomes are risky and sometimes they are cautious.

In order to give a proper answer to these questions, the methodology that was chosen consists, first, in the analysis of the existing literature and theories aiming at explaining groups' tendencies towards risk during international crises. Consequently, the starting point and most important element of this thesis will be the understanding of the concept of risk and its repercussions in governmental decisions. In fact, as it was said earlier, when an element of risk is involved in groups' decision-making processes, the final outcomes are not so easily predictable. In particular, this can be explained by saying that, since emotions limits rationality, it follows that governments' decision-making processes become more complicated. In fact, in order to take a decision, the group has not simply to choose rationally the option that minimizes the costs and maximises the gains, but it has to consider even the desires of its members. For this reason, what can be argued is that, in order to understand how governments take decisions in moments of uncertainty, it is important to analyse, first of all, which elements can manage to influence their decision-making process. However, in general, what can be stated is that having an element of risk during international crises usually implies that either

extremely risky or extremely cautious outcomes are originated and this difference depends on which emotions, beliefs, thoughts and dynamics are developed by the government's members. For this reason, in the second part of this thesis, the methodology that was used consists in the analysis of two real historical and international crises in which all these elements were involved: the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbor. What is interesting is that, in both these crises, the final decisions were taken by groups of people, so the national governments of the countries involved, that worked together in order to find a solution. However, at the end, the outcomes were completely different: in one case, the group managed to find a peaceful solution; in the other, a disastrous war began. Consequently, the comparison between these two cases can be seen as a powerful instrument in order to understand why in some circumstances groups take cautious decisions and in others not. In particular, an analysis of the elements that had a role in creating this divergence will be provided and, in order to create this comparison, different researches will be taken into consideration. Indeed, many scholars, during the years, attempted at explaining the groups' attitude towards risk during these two international crises by applying different psychological and political theories. Consequently, throughout this thesis, there will be a confrontation not only between the two crises in general but even between the different theories used to explain these events. This is interesting because it highlights the fact that, first of all, there is not a consensus over this topic yet. Second, this is useful even to underline that theories which take into consideration different aspects can be successfully applied to explain the same event and that, despite this, they can all reach similar conclusions concerning the general groups' tendency towards risk.

Finally, for what concerns the structure of this thesis, what can be stated is that, on one hand, the first chapter is dedicated to the description of the most accredited and accepted theories aiming at explaining the concept of risk and how groups react to it when they have to take decisions. In particular, the concepts named earlier, e.g., the Prospect Theory, the Expected Utility Theory, Groupthink, Group Polarization and so forth, will be here presented and their major assumptions described. On the other hand, in the second chapter, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the attack on Pearl Harbor and the major theories used to explain the different governments' attitudes towards risk in both these cases will be analysed. Finally, some conclusions, which are derived both from the literature review developed in the first chapter and from the comparison between the two case-studies of the second chapter, will be presented and explained.

## CHAPTER 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last 50 years a very high number of studies whose focus was on groups' behaviour and their general attitude towards risk started to be created. In this context, the most widespread questions that scholars pose to themselves regard mainly the comparison between groups' and individuals' decisions, e.g., do groups perform better (or worse) than individuals? Do groups take better (or worse) decisions than individuals? Are groups more (or less) risk-takers than individuals? What can be said is that, throughout the first chapter of this thesis, the attention will be focused only on the third question. This, in turn, will be useful in order to understand which is the impact of risk in groups' decision-making process and how the groups' attitude towards risk can affect political decisions taken at the international level. In this context, the most common and valuable explanations given by scholars for the understanding of the ways in which the presence of an element of risk can influence groups' decisions are three: choice shift, group polarization and groupthink phenomena. All these ideas rely on the centrality of groups in the political sphere and, in particular, on those dynamics, that are based on psychological principles, which can affect the final decision taken by the group itself. In particular, the main goal of this first chapter is to try to better understand both the major characteristics and the strengths and weaknesses of these three phenomena. In order to achieve this purpose, the methodology that will be used regards the analysis of the main researches made on this issue by the scholars with the consequent creation of a literature review.

For these reasons, the chapter will begin with a general introduction of the discipline that most of all tried to understand the linkage between political decisions and psychology: the so-called political psychology. In this context, a brief introduction concerning its history and its main characteristics will be provided. In the second paragraph, the discourse concerning the concept of risk will be presented with an analysis regarding the different definitions that scholars gave to this term during the years. The third paragraph, in turn, will go deeper into the debate with the application of the concept of risk to the international relation. In particular, at the beginning of this paragraph, the 'world risk society' theory and the realists' and constructivists' different ideas regarding risk in the international sphere will be presented. Then, in the second part, the focus will be on the ongoing debate between the Expected Utility Theory (EUT), the Prospect Theory and the Three Models Theory. What is interesting about these theories is that two of them, namely the EUT and the Prospect Theory, were originally only economic ideas but then they started to be applied even in the discipline of international relations. Finally, in the fourth part, the focus will be placed on the groups. It will start with a general definition of group and with a description of its main characteristics. Then, in order to understand their attitude towards risk, the three phenomena mentioned earlier (choice shift,

group polarization and groupthink) will be described. In particular, each one of them will be analysed using scholars' researches and experiments and a series of strengths/weaknesses and similarities/differences will be listed.

## *2.1 – Introduction to political psychology*

Political psychology is a field of research that was developed in the 1920s with the aim of giving more adequate and complete explanations to the decisions taken by individuals. Indeed, before the establishment of political psychology, economists and policymakers, when dealing with political decisions, always started from the idea, promoted in particular by Von Neumann and Morgenstern in 1947, according to which all the actors are rational. Consequently, they choose, in a rational way, the best possible alternative in order to maximise their gains. However, many scholars noticed that individuals often violate this rule and, for this reason, they started to take into consideration other factors and other fields of research in order to explain why, during history, some particular decisions were taken. In fact, political psychology can be considered an interdisciplinary science with two main characteristics: the first one concerns the fact that its main goal is to try to clarify political behaviours, the second one is that it tries to do so with the application of psychological principles (Cottam et al, 2004).

By looking at the history of this discipline, what can be said is that today a high number of scholars consider Harold Lasswell as the father of the US political psychology. His main thesis, in fact, is based on the idea that 'people projected their unresolved or unrecognized psychic conflicts onto the external political world' (McDermott, 2004, page 4). In particular, a first interesting characteristic of this discipline regards the fact that all the studies focus on the impact of psychology in political decisions rather than on the impact of politics in psychology. A second important characteristic concerns the fact that political psychology is a field of research that was applied to different topics and that, during the course of the years, evolved. Indeed, it is possible to identify four main phases of its development: at the beginning, during the first wave in the 1920s, the majority of the researches were focused on psychobiography, defined as the study of the personality of the leaders. Then, in the second phase, which occurred between the 1940s and 1950s, the main aim was to try to understand the public opinion and the people's voting behaviour (Cottam et al, 2004). However, it was only during the third wave, which took place at the beginning of the 1960s, that political psychology started to be applied to international relations. In fact, during that period, the dynamics of the Cold War were fully developed and scholars started to be interested in the understanding of why some political decisions were adopted and why some dangerous events, e.g.,

the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Vietnam War or the Cuban Missile Crisis, managed to happen. Finally, nowadays we are living the fourth phase in which the attention is directed mainly to the explanation of 'terrorism, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and other patterns of behaviour that involve extraordinary levels of politically motivated violence' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 6).

Finally, another important aspect of political psychology concerns the fact that there is not one single method that can be used in order to analyse its main phenomena and theses. On the contrary, nowadays a very high number of techniques exist which come both from psychology and from political science. First of all, a methodology can be defined as 'what is studied, how it is studied, and the ways in which it is studied' (McDermott, 2004, page 21). In this sense, what is interesting is that, according to Nesbitt-Larking and Kinnvall (2012), a geographical difference in the use of these methodologies can be found too. In fact, 'North America uses abstracted empiricism, while in Europe a more theory-driven and historicist approach predominates' (Nesbitt-Larking and Kinnvall, 2012, page 52). Despite this, according to McDermott (2004), six possible methodologies can be identified in order to explain how psychology interacts with politics. Among the most widespread and used there are the laboratory experiments and simulations. In this context, the participants are in a supervised environment, e.g., the laboratory, and, within it, some specific aspects are manipulated in order to calculate the effects of these variations (McDermott, 2004). A second technique regards the use of questionnaires. This method relies a lot on the individuals' desire to share their ideas and beliefs. However, in this case, what the people say or write can even be false. On the other hand, the third methodology regards the adoption of survey researches whose main aim is to understand the ideas of large groups of people (McDermott, 2004). Finally, the fourth, fifth and sixth techniques are, respectively, the content analyses, the observer ratings of policy-makers and the examination of archives. Three of these methodologies, namely laboratory experiments, questionnaires and observer ratings, are used mostly in psychology while the examination of the archives is part only of the political science tradition (McDermott, 2004). Finally, survey researches and content analyses are used in both disciplines. However, these are not the only applicable techniques and the decision to adopt one methodology or another depends on the scholars' central thesis. In fact, a different perspective about the methods that can be used to study political psychology phenomena was given by McKeown (1984). According to him, the starting point in order to understand political behaviour is subjectivity. In fact, he stated that the most important thing is 'the assignment by the individual of psychological centrality or significance to the objects or events in his or her interpersonal world' (McKeown, 1984, page 416). In other words, the central point of this technique concerns the understanding of an individual's point of view. However, the problem is that it is not easy to measure

subjectivity: one possible way to avoid this problem is the use of a method called operationalism. It works as follow:

Social or intrapersonal relationships are hypothesized, their concepts defined according to and transformed into behavioral operations, and data secured through the application of instruments of operation (for example, liberalism and conservatism scales used in public opinion surveys) (McKeown, 1984, page 418).

However, the problem with this technique concerns the fact that scholars created and used the same attitude scales in order to measure subjectivity. This, in turn, requires ‘consistency of item meanings [...], equivalencies of responses, and [...] the belief that the observer can accurately infer a respondent’s frame of reference’ (McKeown, 1984, page 418). Finally, another possible methodology to study subjectivity is the Q technique. Its functioning is simple: the starting point is the creation of a number of statements regarding a particular topic. The statements are then given to an individual, who ‘is instructed to rank-order them according to a “condition of instruction”’ (McKeown, 1984, page 421). In this way, the final result is the creation of an array called ‘Q sort’ in which the subjective preferences of each individual are listed.

## *2.2 – The concept of risk*

One of the key concepts within the framework of political psychology regards the notion of risk. The problem in this context is that, although political psychology nowadays has become a recognized discipline used to understand and foresee political behaviours, little attention is paid to those political decisions that are taken when an element of risk is involved. However, this is a factor whose impact should not be underestimated since it is really able to change individuals’ beliefs and, consequently, to affect the final outcomes. Indeed, among the most famous examples of the role played by risk in taking bad political decisions during history can be cited the disastrous US involvement in the Vietnam War or the failure of the US invasion in the Bay of Pigs in 1961 or in Iraq in 2003. For all these reasons, and in order to avoid making other poor political decisions in the future, it is fundamental to study, first, how individuals’ behaviours and beliefs change when they have to face a risky situation. Second, it is essential to understand how these individuals’ values and ideas change when people have to work in a group context and to reach a common solution. Indeed, in general, when some risky situations appear and have to be faced by groups, some psychological mechanisms start to operate and people begin to behave differently. Consequently, groups’ behaviour is often inconsistent with each individual’s previous beliefs.

Nowadays there is not a consensus among scholars regarding the definition of this word: what can be said, in fact, is that different meanings can be given to this term depending on the point of view that is considered. According to Breakwell (2014), indeed, if risk is considered in terms of probability, it can be defined as ‘the likelihood of some specific negative event [...] as a result of an exposure to a hazard’ (page 3). Hazard, in turn, can be considered as all the things that can cause damages to the people or the environment. On the other hand, if risk is considered in terms of its effects, it can be defined as ‘the extent of detriment (usually a numerical estimate of the harm) associated with the adverse event’ (Breakwell, 2014, page 3). In this sense, what matters are the consequences deriving from one specific decision and the different ways in which it is possible to measure them. Another perspective regarding this term was offered by McDermott (2001) who sees risk as a fundamental component of decisions which can be considered even as a relative threat to values. In fact, she says that ‘risk-taking behavior clearly involves dynamics of strategic interaction between factors that might threaten certain values and factors that might promote other values’ (McDermott, 2001, page 1). Moreover, she argues that risk propensity does not derive from policymakers’ personality, but from the situation, which, in turn, can be considered only in terms of losses and gains. On the other hand, Althaus (2008) gave a simpler definition of the term: risk, in fact, is considered only as a ‘form of engagement with uncertainty. [...] It is an unknown that holds danger or promise, depending on action taken now’ (page 12). Another possible definition, which is similar to the previous one, was given by Klinke and Renn (2002): ‘we define risk as the possibility that human actions or events lead to consequences that harm aspects of things that human beings value’ (page 1071). Furthermore, Wallach et al (1962) explain risk as ‘the extent to which the decision maker is willing to expose himself to possible failure in the pursuit of a desirable goal’ (page 75). Whyte (1989), in turn, defines it as ‘the probability and the value of the outcomes associated with an act’ (page 40). Finally, according to Yates and Stone (1992), it is not enough to say that risk is the possibility of having losses since that, according to them, three key elements must be taken into consideration:

- a. The losses,
- b. The meaning of those losses,
- c. The uncertainty linked with those losses.

What is important to underline is the fact that all the definitions of risk that were taken into consideration, even though they were different from one another, ‘implies that the severity of experienced harm depends on the causal relationship between a stimulus (human activity or event) and the consequences’ (Klinke and Renn, 2002, page 1071). In this sense, an idea that is often used

to explain the concept of risk, which appears even in the majority of the above-mentioned definitions, is the notion of loss. Yates and Stone (1992), in their paper, gave a simple but complete explanation of this word. Indeed, they define loss as a situation in which ‘we are deprived of an outcome we already possessed or might have acquired; further, we are left with an outcome that is less appealing than the one that was taken away or precluded’ (Yates and Stone, 1992, page 7). Moreover, in order to evaluate the possible losses, what needs to be considered is the so-called ‘reference point’, defined as ‘the current asset position, in which case gains and losses coincide with the actual amounts that are received or paid’ (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979, page 274). Said with other words, every outcome that is considered better than the reference point is a gain while all the results which fall below the reference point are losses. Furthermore, what is important to underline is that, when dealing with the reference point, Yates and Stone (1992) made a further distinction between what they call ‘status quo references’ and ‘non-status quo references’. This difference is based mainly on the perceptions that a person has about the consequences of a specific risky decision: in fact, each individual will evaluate the possible losses or gains in different ways depending on his/her status quo (Yates and Stone, 1992).

### *2.3 – Risk in international relations*

By applying the concept of risk to the studies and the researches in the field of international relations, what can be assumed is that a completely new definition is needed since that a broader variety of internal and external factors, e.g., the role of the government or the presence of international threats, must be taken into consideration. Concerning the linkage between risk and international relations, it is interesting to analyse what Klinke and Renn (2011) say about the idea of risk governance. Indeed, they defined it as ‘the institutional structure and the policy processes that guide or restrain collective activities of a group, society, or international community to regulate, reduce, or control risk problems’ (Klinke and Renn, 2011, page 1). In fact, even though the studies on this issue are relatively recent, nowadays there is an ongoing debate, which sees its origin mainly in the numerous threats posed by terrorism, that regards the possible ways in which risks can be evaluated and managed. Indeed, as Beck (2002) stated, ‘Risk inherently contains the concept of control. [...] It presumes decision-making’ (page 40). In this sense, a first possible point of view on this topic was provided by Beck (2002): he introduces the term ‘world risk society’ and he argues that today the world has become a place of ‘uncontrollable risk’. In particular, his main thesis concerns the fact that the world risk society did not born from an increasing dangerousness of everyday life, but from the ‘de-bounding of uncontrollable risks’ (Beck, 2002, page 41). Starting from this idea, he argues that, in a world with these characteristics, it seems that pessimism is the only possible answer. Indeed,



what can be easily noticed is that many scholars, in particular after September 11<sup>th</sup>, started to believe that uncontrollable risks are now too deeply embedded in the advanced societies. For this reason, nothing can be done to solve this problem. However, according to Beck (2002), this is not true and the best way for the states to manage these threats is to combine domestic policies, national security and international cooperation. The idea described by Beck about the existence of the world risk society was sustained by a high number of scholars; among them, an interesting research was made by Klinke and Renn (2006). In their paper, in fact, they talk about the concept of ‘systematic risks’ which are the result of deep and fast technological, economic and social changes that the world is living on a daily basis. In particular, one important characteristic of these types of risks concerns the fact that they are ‘at the crossroads between natural events [...], economic, social and technological developments and policy driven actions, both at the domestic and international level’ (Klinke and Renn, 2006, “introduction”).

A second perspective about the ideas of risk management and evaluation at the international level can be derived from the constructivists’ versus realists’ points of view. On one hand, according to the constructivists, ‘Risk assessments constitute mental constructions that can be checked at best against standards of consistency, cohesion, and internal conventions of logical deduction’ (Klinke and Renn, 2002, page 1073). In other words, according to this first perspective, what really matters is the understanding of how social norms influence people’s perception of the risk. On the other hand, realists perceive that the possibility of having a real mathematical estimation of the risk is the best way in order to predict the hazard (Klinke and Renn, 2002). What can be easily assumed is that the origin of this debate can be found mainly in the different definitions that the two factions give to risk: in fact, on one hand, constructivists perceive risk only as an idea which is socially constructed; on the other hand, according to the realists, risk is not a social construction, it is something that really exists in nature (Clapton, 2011). However, both approaches have some weak points: for example, focusing the attention only on objective calculations means that social processes of risk information are ignored (Klinke and Renn, 2002). At the same time, the constructivists’ point of view ‘may lead to more fatalities and other adverse effects than necessary’ considering that, within the society, only a limited number of resources can be used to reduce risks (Klinke and Renn, 2002, page 1073). For this reason, a compromise between realists and constructivists was found in the study made by Sandmann in 1988, in which risk is considered as a combination of hazard and outrage (Klinke and Renn, 2002). However, this definition has some weaknesses too since that it did not really contribute to end this debate. Indeed, there are no suggestions on how to successfully mix mathematical calculations and social perceptions.

### *2.3.1 – Expected Utility Theory, Prospect Theory and the Three Models Theory*

When the definition of risk is adopted in the field of international relations, another important aspect that should be taken into consideration is the role played by the theories which deal with how the different actors take decisions. In particular, these theories can be very useful in order to understand the level of rationality of the different actors in the moment in which they have to face uncertain situations. Indeed, nowadays it exists a debate between the ideas provided, on one side, by the Expected Utility Theory (EUT) and, on the other side, by the prospect theory. What can be said is that a common characteristic of both these theories is that they focus on the decision-making process in situations of uncertainty. However, the main difference concerns the way in which they look at the actors that are involved in this process. Indeed, on one hand, the key point of Von Neumann and Morgenstern's EUT is that the actors are always rational and that they act in order to maximize their self-interests. Moreover, the main assumption of the Expected Utility Theory concerns the fact that an individual, when he/she has to face a situation of uncertainty, chooses between the different alternatives by comparing the expected utilities of each alternative (Tacnet and Dezert, 2011). A possible explanation of the main principles of this theory can be considered the following: 'policymakers examine the probable consequences of each viable alternative under consideration and choose the one best expected to meet their main objectives' (Herek et al, 1987, page 206). In this sense, what matters for this theory are the final and absolute gains that can be obtained; in other words, 'what you end up with is more important than how much you gained' (McDermott, 2004, page 71). Resuming, a general explanation of the EUT mechanisms can be the following:

actors try to maximize their expected utility by weighting the utility of each possible outcome of a given course of action by the probability of its occurrence, summing over all possible outcomes for each strategy, and selecting that strategy with the highest expected utility (Levy, 1997, page 88).

However, more recent studies have shown that this is not always true and this is the reason why Kahneman and Tversky (1979) have elaborated a new theory, the Prospect theory, which seeks to explain how people actually take decisions in situations of risk. In general, this theory predicts that risk assessment is highly influenced by emotions and that, consequently, 'individuals tend to be risk averse in a domain of gains [...], and relatively risk seeking in a domain of losses' (McDermott, 2001, page 18). By reading this assumption, what can be seen is that, within the Prospect theory, two important concepts in order to evaluate the actors' behaviour towards risk are the ideas of gains and losses, while the concept of utility is not even taken into consideration. Moreover, according to the Prospect theory, the starting point for the evaluation of the possible gains or losses is, in general, the

status-quo reference point and not the net asset level as was predicted by the Expected Utility Theory. This phenomenon is called ‘status quo bias’ and it can be described as the tendency of individuals to consider more relevant the losses deriving from the costs of moving away from the status quo than its possible gains (Levy, 1997). For this reason, the Prospect theory predicts that, in general, people will take decision that will help them to maintain a certain status quo. In particular, this idea was summarized by Kahneman and Tversky (1984) with the so-called ‘Value Function Curve’, which can be seen in Figure 1. According to Kahneman and Tversky (1984) and McDermott (2004), this model has three main characteristics: the first one is that the final outcomes are evaluated in terms of relative gains and losses while the absolute ones are not so important. Said with other words, in this context the individual’s starting position has to be considered too since it is important to understand how much he/she gained or lost during the process. Second, ‘the value curve is concave for gains and convex for losses’: this means that, in a domain of losses, people will be more willing to take risks while, in a domain of gains, they will be more cautious (McDermott, 2004, page 71; Kahneman and Tversky, 1984, page 342). Indeed, as Haas (2001) stated, ‘Prospect theory does not predict that some people will be risk-acceptant and [...] others [...] risk-averse, but that the same individuals will demonstrate both proclivities depending on domain’ (page 252). Finally, the curve is steeper for losses than for gains because, from a psychological point of view, a loss hurts more than a gain. This third characteristic has been called loss aversion.

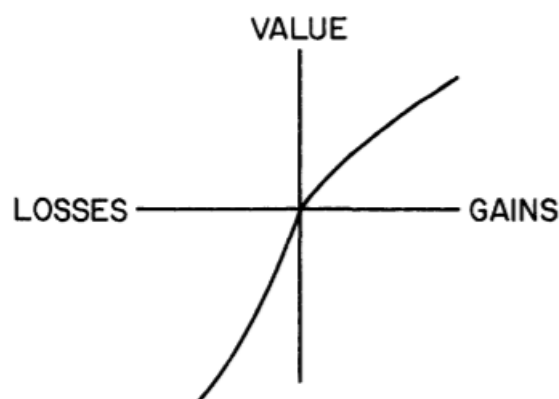


Figure 1 – Value Function Curve (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984, page 342)

Other two basic concepts that are important to define within the framework of the Prospect theory in order to better understand the concept of risk are the ideas of loss aversion and framing. The first one refers to ‘the tendency for individuals to be more sensitive to reductions in their levels of well-being than to increases’ (Benartzi and Thaler, 1993, page 73). This is linked with the so-called

‘endowment effect’ described by Kahneman et al (1991): it consists of the idea that an individual is more concerned about the possibility of losing something that he/she already possesses rather than about acquiring goods that he/she does not have yet. Another possible way to explain this phenomenon was provided by Levy (1997): he stated that ‘the disutility of relinquishing a good is greater than the utility of acquiring it’ (page 89). In other words, there are biases in the evaluation of the possible gains and losses. Consequently, this endowment effect implies that ‘the prospect of a loss of a given magnitude normally is not balanced by the prospect of a comparable gain’ (Nincic, 1997, page 99). This idea, in turn, is strictly linked with the concept of framing which, in turn, can be considered as the ‘decision-maker’s perception, in terms of gains or losses, of the possible outcomes of a risky decision’ (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984 in Whyte, 1993, pages 432-433). Said with other words, risky decisions can lead to different outcomes depending on the way in which this decision is framed. Moreover, as Levy (1997) underlines, ‘A change in frame can result in a change in preferences (preference reversal) even if the values and probabilities associated with outcomes remain the same’ (page 90). In this sense, what can be added about framing is that it is ‘controlled partly by the formulation of the problem and partly by the norms, habits, and personal characteristics of the decision-maker’ (Kahneman and Tversky, 1981, page 453). Furthermore, the importance of framing was underlined even by McDermott (2001): ‘part of what determines whether the situation is considered to be one of “gains” or “losses” depends on how the options are “framed” or constructed prior to choice’ (page 5). However, what is innovative about McDermott’s study concerns the fact that, according to her, framing tasks are always influenced by the so-called ‘judgmental heuristics’. In fact, as many political psychologists underline, there is a direct relationship between framing and emotions. For example, Druckman and McDermott (2008) found out that different emotions can have different repercussions in how individuals frame the problem and assess the level of risk. Indeed, when positive emotions, like enthusiasm, or some negative emotions, like anger, are at stake, people will tend to be more risk-seeking; on the contrary, other negative emotions, such as distress, enhance the framing effects and make people more risk-averse (Druckman and McDermott, 2008). Finally, according to Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988), there are two different varieties of frame: the neutral framing and the status quo framing. The first one happens when all the possible options are considered equal; the second, on the other hand, occurs when ‘one of the choice alternative was placed in the status quo position and the others became alternatives to the status quo’ (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988, page 8).

Originally, Kahneman and Tversky created the prospect theory in order to understand only individual actors’ economic behaviours. However, starting from the 1980s, these principles started to

be used to explain the political behaviour of those groups of people who play an important role not only at the national, but even at the international level. In this regard, one important scholar that was able to successfully apply the ideas of the prospect theory to the discipline of international relations was Levy (1997). In his paper, in fact, he managed to provide six different assumptions of the ways in which these two fields of research can be linked together:

1. In order to preserve their power and their reputation both at the national and international level political leaders are more willing to take risky decisions;
2. On one hand, in the moment in which a leader suffers a loss he/she has the tendency to take more risks in order to recover the previous loss. On the other hand, when the leader manages to gain something he/she will take excessive risks to try to defend this gain;
3. Since in general the accommodation to losses is slow, the leader's decisions and behaviour will be influenced by the so-called 'sunk costs';
4. States usually manage to cooperate in the moment in which they have to divide gains, it is more difficult to find ways to cooperate in the distribution of losses;
5. There are higher probabilities of deterring an international adversary from taking an action and from making gains than of deterring him/her from recovering losses;
6. 'cooperation among states or other actors in social dilemmas [...] is more likely if the issue involves cooperation in not taking from the commons than if it involves contributing to a public good' (Levy, 1997, page 93). In fact, the first one involves gains, while, from the second, it is possible to derive some losses.

Finally, a third possible theory that can be used in order to understand the different actors' behaviours at the international level are the three conceptual frameworks provided by Allison (1969). In this paper, his main aim was to try to explain the Cuban Missile Crisis by taking three different points of view, which he called Models. Model I is called Rational Policy Model and it is based on Von Neumann and Morgenstern's EUT described earlier. In this sense, 'To explain an occurrence in foreign policy simply means to show how the government could have rationally chosen that action' (Allison, 1969, page 693). Moreover, in order to describe the characteristics of this first model, Allison developed three main assumptions:

1. Events at the international level are considered as actions promoted by national governments. For this reason, each government will rationally choose the action that will be able to maximise its gains;

2. The government is regarded as a rational agent which has specific goals to reach. Moreover, the fact of having a problem pushes the state to find a solution that, in turn, can be considered as the set of actions that are undertaken in order to rationally solve the problem;
3. 'If a nation performed a particular action, that nation must have had ends towards which the action constituted an optimal means' (Allison, 1969, page 694).

The second model described by Allison is the Organizational Process Model. In fact, even though it is possible to simplify the concept of government by saying that it is a rational actor which possesses perfect information, this is not true. It is important to consider the fact that the government is 'a conglomerate of semi-feudal, loosely allied organizations, each with a substantial life of its own' (Allison, 1969, page 698). For this reason, and this represents the main idea of this second model, the government can be seen as an organization which follows standard patterns of behaviour. Consequently, 'behavior at one time,  $t$ , is marginally different from behavior at  $t - 1$ . [...] behavior at  $t + 1$  will be marginally different from behavior at the present time' (Bendor and Hammond, 1992, page 309). In this sense, a first important characteristic of the organizations is that, in order to work properly, within them there must be coordination among each individual's behaviour. A second characteristic is that organizations are not static actors, they are dynamic since they can learn and grow. If all these characteristics are taken into consideration, what can be assumed is that the three paradigms described earlier in this second model will change as follow:

1. Events at the international level are considered as actions promoted by organizations;
2. The main actors are not the nations or the governments, but a conglomerate of organizations which are controlled by government leaders;
3. 'If a nation performs an action of this type today, its organizational components must yesterday have been performing [...] an action only marginally different from this action' (Allison, 1969, page 702).

Finally, Model III is called Bureaucratic Politics Model. The starting assumption of this third idea concerns the fact that 'the leaders who sit on top of organizations are not a monolithic group. Rather, each is [...] a player in a central, competitive game' (Allison, 1969, page 707). The central idea is that the actors have to bargain and to compete with other players that are positioned in a hierarchical way within the government. In other words, they all share the power. Resuming, government behaviour, in this third paradigm, is determined by bargaining games and there is a clear difference between political leaders and organization's leaders. However, what has to be taken into consideration is that men can have different points of view. For this reason, the final decision taken by the state can

be seen as the result of the prevalence of one group's desires over those of the others. Consequently, what matters are the power and the abilities of each group. The three assumptions, in this case, are again different:

1. The decisions taken at the international level are considered as the result of the bargaining games which happen at the national level;
2. The main actors are not nations or organization, they are the individuals who bargain;
3. 'If a nation performed an action, that action was the outcome of bargaining among individuals and groups within the government' (Allison, 1969, page 710).

#### *2.4 – Are groups more risk-takers than individuals?*

Within the framework of the third and fourth waves of political psychology, a particular attention was placed on the role played by the groups both at the national and international levels. Groups can be defined as two or more individuals who have decided to work together in order to achieve a certain number of goals and whose emotions become linked with the group's performance. In this sense, 'Group decision making can be considered a social process which takes individual preferences and concatenates them into a single group preference' (Green and Taber, 1980, page 97-98). What is important to say about this topic is that 'people are influenced by groups, but they are also personally driven to support groups to which they are strongly attached. They make sacrifices [...] for the sake of the group' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 10). Indeed, particularly at the international level, this tendency can be clearly seen in the outbreak of ethnic conflicts or in the practices and activities of some extremist groups.

This attention towards groups is a particularly important aspect since that, traditionally, economists focus only on the study of how the single individuals take every-day decisions, generally linked with money and investments, in conditions of uncertainty. This branch of the economy is commonly known as 'behavioural economic'. However, what is important to underline is that today a very high number of decisions are taken by groups of people. In fact, what can be observed is that:

the contemporary handling of collectively relevant risk problems has been shifted from traditional state-centric approaches with hierarchically organized governmental agencies as the dominant locus of power to multilevel systems, in which the political authority for handling risk problems is distributed to separately constituted public bodies with overlapping jurisdictions that do not match the traditional hierarchical order (Klinke and Renn, 2011, page 1).

For example, within the discipline of international relations what can be noticed is that the main actors which usually are taken into consideration and analysed are states, governments, pressure groups, NGOs and so forth. All these institutions, of course, are formed by groups of people whose decisions are fundamental since that they affect a very high number of individuals. In fact, as underlined by Cottam et al (2004), 'Political groups are often responsible for making decisions with large-scale consequences, such as whether to send troops to a region in conflict or to escalate an existing conflict' (page 78). Moreover, an important assumption which can be made is that today this tendency is emphasized even by the dynamics of globalization. In fact, since the world is becoming more and more interconnected, all these actors have to face an increasing number of situations of uncertainty. In this context, the decisions that they have to take are becoming even more important since that they have effects not only on the people living within one single country, but even on individuals all over the world. This has a clear link, for example, with Beck's (2002) theory of the 'world risk society' described earlier and his idea of the 'de-bounding of uncontrollable risks'. Nowadays, the most famous and important example of this tendency is probably linked with the problem of climate change.

In order to understand groups, it is important to underline that, first of all, 'political decisions are made in response to a perceived problem' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 79). In this sense, what needs to be highlighted is that, in the majority of cases, the 'perceived problem' regards a situation in which an element of risk is involved. For this reason, it is important to introduce a general definition of group decision under risk. From a merely economic point of view, 'A group decision under risk is defined as the process by which  $g > 1$  individuals in a group select one lottery  $l$  out of a set of available lotteries  $L$ ' (Nieboer, 2013, page 8). If this idea is applied to the international relations, what can be said is that governments have to create 'institutional settings that are conducive to resolve cognitive, evaluative and normative problems, and conflicts of risks' (Klinke and Renn, 2011, page 1). Said with other words, they have to generate an environment in which decision-makers can successfully handle the crises deriving from decisions taken in situations of uncertainty. In this sense, by linking together all these ideas, what can be assumed is that political risk can be defined as 'a way of thinking and dealing with all issues and policy within a context of political uncertainty' (Althaus, 2008, page 39). This, in turn, includes both external and internal risks that, consequently, are influenced by what people think and believe. In this sense, the main focus of the studies which deal with this issue regards the understanding of whether groups, in situations of uncertainty, are more or less risk-taking compared to individuals. In order to answer to this question, it is important to begin from the general assumption, provided by Kahneman and Tversky (1984), according to which, when policymakers



have to deal with uncertain situations, they do it without any previous knowledge of its consequences. According to Tacnet and Dezert (2011), these types of decisions are called Multi-Criteria Decision Making (MCDM) and, within this framework, the choice of one option or another is based upon quantitative and qualitative criteria. For this reason, what can be concluded is that, generally speaking, ‘the choice of an act may be construed as the acceptance of a gamble that can yield various outcomes with different probabilities’ (Kahneman and Tversky, 1984, page 341).

Nowadays, a very high number of studies can be found which take into consideration the risk-taking attitudes of groups. It is a debate that began during the 1960s and 1970s and it was fostered by the occurrence of international events such as the Vietnam war, the Bay of Pigs invasion and, in general, by the logics of the Cold War itself. In fact, in all these cases, the real question that researchers posed to themselves is why did these events occur? Why did policy-makers take such dangerous and potentially-disastrous decisions? What can be said is that there is not a consensus over this issue yet: in fact, each scholar gave a different explanation of this phenomenon and, consequently, each one of them arrived at different conclusions. In particular, in order to convince other scholars about the truthfulness of their ideas, researchers created a very high number of theories and they developed different techniques, instruments and experiments to try to confirm their starting hypotheses. However, the main problem linked with this topic concerns the fact that, more or less at the beginning of the new millennium, a decreasing number of original studies, experiments, theories and researches were created and developed. For this reason, all the theories that the scholars use to answer to this question and that will be described in the following paragraphs are based mainly on a literature that was developed some decades ago. Despite this, the three most widespread and accepted answers in order to explain why some bad decisions were taken and, more in general, which is the groups’ attitude towards risk are the choice shift, the group polarization and the groupthink phenomena.

#### *2.4.1 – Choice shift phenomenon*

A first possible answer in the understanding of the risk-taking behaviour of groups, which is sustained by a very high number of scholars, is the idea of choice shift. At the beginning, it was called risky shift and it was a phenomenon which was created and explained for the first time by Stoner, a scholar from the MIT. In fact, in his first paper, published in 1961, he defined this phenomenon as the tendency of the people forming part of a group to adopt, in situations of uncertainty, riskier decisions if compared to the ones that would have been taken by people facing individually that same unknown situation (Eliaz et al, 2006). What can be said is that, at least in the years following its the

creation, a high number of scholars favoured this thesis. One example is the study promoted by Whyte (1989), who argues that ‘a group will be inclined to be more risky than its average member was before participation in group discussion, when that average member had an initial preference for risk’ (page 45). Indeed, particularly in situations in which the group has to decide between a sure loss and a larger loss that, in case of success, can give even the possibility of gaining more, Whyte managed to provide evidences of the fact that groups are more likely, generally speaking, to take the riskier decision (Whyte, 1989). Other scholars that sustained this thesis were Wilpert et al (1976). Indeed, they stated that ‘contrary to predominant beliefs about group forces towards social conformity, it seemed that individuals chose more conservative decision alternatives than groups did, after periods of discussing options’ (Wilpert et al, 1976, page 366). Thus, according to this theory, people’s level of agreement to take risks changes when they are part of a group. This idea became really widespread in the 1960s and 1970s and a wide literature, whose aim was to explain the reasons for the existence of this phenomenon, started to be created in those years.

For example, one possible explanation for the risky-shift phenomenon is the so-called ‘diffusion of responsibility’ (DOR) hypothesis provided by Wallach and Kogan (1965) and Kogan et al (1963). This approach assumes that, in general, groups are more willing to take risky decisions because, in case of failure, the members can share the responsibility. What is interesting is that, in order to verify this idea, Kogan et al (1963) developed the so-called ‘opinion questionnaire’ or ‘Choice Dilemma Questionnaire’ (CDQ) which contains a description of 12 hypothetical real-life scenarios regarding important life choices, e.g., a job opportunity, a severe medical operation, the investment of money, the possibility to escape from prison and so forth. For each one of these situations, every person that took part to the experiment had, first of all, to personally choose between two possible alternatives. In general, one of these two alternatives is not risky but it entails a mediocre outcome; the other is much riskier but, in case of success, the gains are higher too. Then, all the participants had to discuss in group. What can be said is that, thanks to this experiment, they managed to prove that individuals’ decisions before the discussion in group are less risky than the final group’s decision (Wallach et al, 1962). According to them, this tendency can be explained only with the DOR phenomenon: indeed, individuals are more willing to take risks when they are in group because, in case of loss, they can share it and bear with it all together. Linked with the Diffusion of Responsibility hypothesis, what can be said is that a high number of scholars, for example Whyte (1993) and Moscovici and Zavalloni (1969), sustain that, among all the elements that compose the group interaction, the group discussion is probably the most important one. This, according to them, is because the group discussion is the moment in which the real shifts towards riskier solutions are produced. In fact, as Graham and Harris

(1970) stated, groups after the discussion will tend to choose lower possibilities of success than will the average group member before the group discussion.

A second possible explanation for the risky shift phenomenon regards the so-called 'culture-value theory' proposed by Brown. According to this theory, taking risks and having a self-image as risk-taker is considered, in certain areas of the world, something with a higher value from the cultural point of view than being cautious (Belovicz and Finch, 1971). Even in this case, the role of the group discussion should not be underestimated. Indeed, it was suggested that, 'Individuals who find themselves in a group of people advocating a riskier position than their own shift toward risk, causing the average for the group as a whole to shift toward risk' (Murnighan and Castore, 1975, page 171). Another perspective regarding the culture-value theory which, in turn, focuses mainly on the exchange of information within the group was provided by Vinokur (1971). In fact, he assumes that it is important to consider not only the frequency of the arguments but also their quality. Indeed, in some cultures, 'information in the group discussion is most often information supporting the risky alternative' (Murnighan and Castore, 1975, page 171). In this way, if persuasive arguments favouring the riskier decision are presented to the group, the utilities linked with that option will be altered and the shift towards a risky decision will occur (Morgan and Beatty, 1976). Summarizing, according to this point of view:

When subjects prefer a risky alternative and discover a "key argument", defined as the rationale that allowed the group to hedge their selection by recognizing they could select the less attractive alternative if the first did not succeed, they indicate their increased preference by shifting in the direction of the risky alternative (Morgan and Beatty, 1976, pages 304-305).

What is interesting is that there are studies which, in order to explain the risk-taking behaviour of groups both at the national and international level, take in consideration both the hypothesis of the diffusion of responsibility and the ideas of the culture-value theory at the same time. A clear example of this tendency was provided by Zaleska and Kogan (1971): indeed, they conducted an experiment in which they compared the level of risk used by individuals and by groups both when they have to decide for themselves and for others. They discovered that, at the individual-level, the fear of a failure is so high that it overcomes even the gains in case of success. For this reason, people usually are more cautious both when decide for themselves and for others. This is not the case at the group-level since that the two scholars provided the evidence that groups, both when they have to decide for other groups and for themselves, tend to act more in a risky way. Consequently, according to them, this can be explained both with Kogan and Wallach's idea and with Brown's theory since, on one side, in case of failure the members of the group can share the responsibility and, on the other side, there is an

important cultural component due to the fact that in many societies risk has a greater value than caution (Zaleska and Kogan, 1971). A second experiment which obtained similar results was made by Chakravarty et al (2010). In fact, they were able to confirm that individuals appear risk-averse when making decisions for themselves but they become more risk-taking when they are in group. In order to obtain these results, they used the so-called 'Multiple Price List' (MPL) in which each actor has to choose between two alternatives, called A and B, one riskier than the other (Chakravarty et al, 2010). However, differently from Zaleska and Kogan's study, they found out that people tend to be more risk-seeking even when they have to take decision for other individuals. The explanation for this finding can be considered the fact that, in case of loss, are other individuals and not themselves those who have to cope with this failure.

However, as Belovicz and Finch (1971) noted, a first weak point of the risky-shift phenomenon concerns the fact that only a very limited number of studies were really able to prove, through experiments, the existence of this phenomenon in everyday life. Indeed, they underlined the fact that only the researched made by Wallach, Kogan and Bem (1962, 1963, 1965) and partially by Lamm et al (1969) were successful, while all the other attempts were always failures. In fact, Lamm et al sustain the existence of this phenomenon too. However, what is different in their contribution is that their main goal was to understand whether, in real-life situations, there are links between pessimism and risky-shift. Through this study, they understood that, in order to have a shift towards pessimism, being committed to a risky decision is not sufficient. On the other hand, 'discussion based on the actual success and failure probabilities of the risky alternative generates enhanced pessimism' (Lamm et al, 1969, page 13).

Then, a second aspect that is important to take into consideration in order to assess the effectiveness of the risky-shift phenomenon concerns the culture-value theory. In fact, as stated by Hong (1978), 'The lack of research on decision-making in distinctively cautious cultures has hindered [its] evaluation' (page 345). In other words, the culture-value theory is a valuable theory that was studied and confirmed by many scholars (e.g., Levinger and Schneider, 1969; Wallach and Wing, 1968). However, the main weak point of these studies is that they do not take into consideration all the possible cultures. In fact, one characteristic of the political psychology in general is that it is focused mainly on the study of the US foreign policy decisions and very little or no attention is given to other countries and cultures. In conclusion, what can be said is that 'the literature [...] gives strong support to the risky shift phenomenon only when the Wallach-Kogan Dilemmas-of-Choice questionnaire is used' (Belovicz and Finch, 1971, page 152).

Finally, the discussion which takes place within the framework of the group can be considered as the third and most relevant weakness of this phenomenon since it is highly influenced by the role played by the leaders. In fact, it is proved that, most of the time, ‘subjects perceived the members who advocated a high level of risk (or caution) to be more influential’ (Eliaz et al, 2004a, page 7). In other words, people within the group will tend to follow what the leader decides, but this decision is not always riskier, it can be even more cautious. However, what can be said is that this aspect has already been taken into consideration by Stoner that, at the end, in his 1968 paper, managed to prove the existence even of this opposite phenomenon. He called it ‘cautious shift’ and it is an event which can be described as ‘a group tendency to exhibit greater restraint in risk taking relative to the proclivities of individuals in that group’ (Eliaz et al, 2006, page 1321). What is interesting is that, in his 1961 paper, Stoner’s original aim was to prove the existence of the cautious shift rather than of the risky shift phenomenon. This, according to Reynolds et al (2009), was due to the fact that Stoner believed that individuals, when taking decisions in group, would have the tendency to become more cautious. In order to prove this, he evaluated military generals during history and he found out that ‘as each general takes on more responsibility, the risk taking level is reduced’ (Reynolds et al, 2009, page 64). Consequently, from this research, new theories and methodologies started to be created whose aim is to evaluate the impact of various factors in promoting either a risky or a cautious shift. For example, one possible instrument in order to understand which factors can promote risky or cautious changes is the so-called ‘data collection methodology’. It takes into consideration the ‘Person related variables of the decision maker (P) and decision task (T)’ (Wilpert et al, 1976, page 366). What is interesting is that, according to Wilpert et al (1976), the P-variables can be distinguished into personal experience, micro-social background and macro-social background. Plus, both the T- and the P-variables can be grouped according to their importance for the decision-maker. At the end, using this approach, these scholars found out that ‘individuals revise their policy decisions toward a more conservative stance after they have had an opportunity to discuss the policy situation in a committee’ (Wilpert et al, 1976, page 367). What is relevant in this study is that it manages to solve even the problem linked with the culture-value theory described earlier: in fact, they collected data not only in the European Union but even in Japan and Latin America. In this way, they took into consideration even cultures which are different from the Western one and they found that, even in these countries, there is the tendency to adopt conservative group decisions.

For all these reasons, starting from Stoner’s two papers, scholars coined the term ‘choice shift phenomenon’ which takes into consideration both the idea of risky and cautious shifts. This choice shift is a phenomenon which can be defined as the tendency of groups ‘to make decisions that are

more extreme than, but in the same direction as, the initial tendencies manifested in population from which the groups are drawn' (McGuire et al, 1987, page 927). Another definition can be derived from Hinsz and Davis's (1984) paper: in fact, they consider it as 'the difference between the mean of the group members' prediscussion responses and the actual group decision on the issue' (page 262). Finally, this thesis was sustained even by Cottam et al (2004). Indeed, what they stated is that it is wrong to consider risky or cautious shifts of groups decisions as two different phenomena. In fact, since one characteristic of the groups is that they tend to amplify individuals' behaviours, what can be assumed is that they make decisions which are more extreme in both directions and this depends on 'what position dominated at the outset of the discussion' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 85). In this sense, a feature that can be found in all the theories and models describe so far concerns the importance of the group discussion in producing risky or cautious shifts in the group's behaviour. This principle can be applied for the choice shift phenomenon too and it can be easily seen in Fitzpatrick's (1989) research. In fact, in her paper, she says that, 'Regardless of whether or not a consensus opinion position is required, the private postdiscussion opinion position of the group is, on the average, more extreme than the group's prediscussion opinion position' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 316). Resuming, by adopting a strictly theoretical and economic point of view, what can be said about the choice shift phenomenon is that:

[...] an individual exhibits a risky shift over  $r$  and  $s$  within the group problem  $g$  if she is indifferent between  $r$  and  $s$ , yet strictly prefers to "vote" for  $r$  in the context of that group problem. Likewise, she exhibits a cautious shift over  $r$  and  $s$  (within the group problem  $g$ ) if she is indifferent between  $r$  and  $s$ , yet strictly prefers to "vote" for  $s$  in the context of that group problem. A shift — risky or cautious — is generally referred to as a choice shift (Eliaz et al, 2004b, page 5).

#### 2.4.2 – *Group-induced polarization*

Another phenomenon that the scholars regard as a possible answer in order to understand whether groups are more or less willing to take risks compared to individuals is the so-called 'group-induced polarization'. This concept is very similar to the idea of choice shift defined earlier and it can be described as a circumstance that happens in the moment in which there is 'an increase in the extremity of the average response of the subject population [in post group discussion]' (Myers and Lamm, 1976, page 603). Another possible explanation for the origin of this phenomenon was provided, for example, by Burnstein and Vinokur (1974): 'shifts toward risk (or caution) refer to systematic revisions in choice resulting from group discussion' (page 305). Said with other words, when this phenomenon takes place, a change in an individual's responses happens either during the group discussion or during the post-group discussion. Finally, a different definition of group

polarization was provided by Reynolds et al (2009). By looking at this phenomenon from a different perspective, in fact, they stated that it is the tendency of the group to 'be pushed by a dominant personality to become more risk loving or more risk averse in certain situations' (Reynolds et al, 2009, page 64). In this sense, the role of the leader becomes fundamental. Moreover, two important characteristics are worth to underline regarding this phenomenon. The first one concerns the fact that there is a higher probability for polarization to occur with subjective judgements rather than with objective ones (Myers and Lamm, 1976). In fact, as Burnstein and Vinokur (1974) stated, 'shifts have been shown to fit a subjective expected utility model that assumes that subjects do not assign value or utility to riskiness' (page 305). The second is that 'the greater the initial divergence in individual positions, the greater the polarization induced by the group discussion' (Moscovici, 1992, page 117). In particular, one of Moscovici's main thesis concerns the fact that polarization does not derive from a diffusion of responsibility but from a higher degree of involvement.

In general, there are different factors that can be taken into consideration in order to explain the phenomenon of group polarization and, starting from them, scholars created three major theories. The first one concerns the fact that, within the group, there is the tendency of the members to change their behaviour to stay where the majority position of the group laid with the aim of maintaining their self-image. This is called 'social comparison theory' and it was developed for the first time by Festinger in 1954. Its main characteristic concerns the fact that people within the group want to gain the approval of the other members and, in order to reach this goal, they undertake a more extreme position. In fact, according to Friedkin (1999), 'Actors initially espouse opinions that are less extreme than their true opinions [...] and that (after group discussion [...]) they shift their opinions towards their true values' (page 858). In this sense, Fitzpatrick (1989) added that this phenomenon, in general, happens when people compare their points of view to those held by other individuals in order to assess the accuracy of these beliefs. Moreover, she underlines that, when a person is not certain about his/her ideas, 'this comparison may lead the individual to revise the opinion to make it more like the opinion held by the similar others' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 317). This thesis was supported, for example, by Turner et al (1979) whose main aim in their paper is to link social comparison with ingroup interests. In this way, they managed to conclude that social comparison, in general, tends to create competition towards outgroups and their consequent exclusion from the group. Furthermore, another study that sustains this thesis was developed by Forsyth (2000). In order to give support to the idea of the social comparison theory, in fact, he describes the Westgate study made by Festinger. In this experiment, a certain number of houses were filled with students and their families. At the end, what they discovered was that, slowly, some small groups started to be created and, within them, some group standards

strongly based on social comparison were established too (Festinger et al, 1950 in Forsyth, 2000). Finally, another perspective regarding this issue was developed by Fitzpatrick (1989). Indeed, she explained social comparison by saying that it occurs in the moment in which moderate group members 'learn, in the course of discussion, that other group members favour the more extreme position that they prefer' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 317). Fitzpatrick's main contribution in this topic regards the fact that she perceives group discussion to possess a normative role since its function is, first of all, to reveal the points of view of the group members.

A second explanation for the group polarization phenomenon can be the so-called 'cognitive learning' or 'self-categorization theory'. It consists of the fact that, when the majority of the group has a clear preference towards one specific decision, there will be the strengthening of this preference during the post-group discussion. In other words, the group's members tend to learn the others' opinions and, consequently, to conform to an extreme in-group position. However, what is important to underline is that 'polarization may occur after group members have defined the social identity of the group and identified with the group' (Friedkin, 1999, page 859). Moreover, the most relevant difference that can be found between cognitive learning and social comparison lays in the scholars' main focus of attention, either in the moment of the group discussion or in the period of time that follows it. In this sense, a first paper in which the role of cognitive learning in group polarization was explained is in Fitzpatrick's (1989) one: she stated that, during the discussion, arguments in favour and against a particular decision are discussed. In this way, 'cognitive learning occurs, group members revise their opinion position in the direction of the preferred position, and [post-group discussion] polarization is observed' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 317). For these reasons, in her paper she added the fact that, if in the social comparison theory group discussion has a normative role, in the cognitive learning theory the discussion has an informational function since its main aim is to exchange arguments and ideas. Another research that confirmed this hypothesis was developed by Burnstein and Vinokur (1975): they underline the fact that the arguments that are generated within the group during the discussion always favour the majority position of the group and they are able to create a post-discussion polarization. On the other hand, many scholars, such as Baker and Petty (1994), Peterson and Nemeth (1996) and Wood et al (1996), sustained this thesis by adding that, in general, there are two key elements, namely heuristics and social comparison, that play a fundamental role in pushing people towards social learning and conformity. In fact, 'when individuals are in groups, and social comparison processes convince members that most of the group members are in agreement, then such heuristics as "majority rules" will prompt them to accept the majority's viewpoint' (Forsyth, 2000, 'Majority Influence and Social Comparison'). This idea was supported



even by Chen et al (1996): in their paper, in fact, they examined the Accuracy- versus Impression-motivated Heuristic-Systematic Processing. This is a model which is based on the idea that people perceive the information either in a heuristic or in a systematic way. In this sense, 'whereas heuristic processing is characterized by the application of simple decision rules [...], systematic processing is marked by a more comprehensive analysis of judgement-relevant information' (Chen et al, 1996, page 262). Moreover, in this paper, they distinguish between two methods in order to which people can process information and take decisions. On one hand, an accuracy-based processing relies on real and valid judgements, while the impression-motivated processing is based upon the 'desire to determine attitudes that will satisfy current social goals' (Chen et al, 1996, page 263). The main result of this experiment concerns the fact that they managed to understand that the actors involved were highly responsive to changes in the social context. Consequently, they were affected by cognitive learning and conformity. The basic principle that guided the people that took part to the experiment, in fact, was 'go along to get along' (Chen et al, 1996, page 263).

The third idea in order to explain group polarization is described by the so-called 'persuasive arguments theory' developed for the first time by Burnstein and Vinokur (1974). In order to create this thesis, these two scholars started from the idea that shifts toward risk after the group discussion has little or nothing to do with the concept of risk per se. In particular, they developed three main assumptions to explain this theory: the first one concerns the fact that, before the discussion among the group's members, 'the average individual choice is biased toward the alternative that elicits the greatest number and/or the most persuasive arguments' (Burnstein and Vinokur, 1974, page 307). Second, the changes of the members' points of view which occur after the discussion is linked with the sharing of the so-called 'persuasive arguments'. Third, if some of these arguments are presented before the group discussion, each individual 'is induced to revise his choice in a manner similar to that observed following group discussion' (Burnstein and Vinokur, 1974, page 307). In this sense, what can be noticed is that, according to Burnstein and Vinokur, group polarization can happen both before and after the group discussion. However, this is not shared by all the scholars. In fact, according to Hinsz and Davis (1984), this phenomenon can be explained by saying that, at the beginning, the group's members do not know all the persuasive arguments, but then, during the discussion, these ideas are shared and, consequently, the individuals can change opinion and polarization occurs. Moreover, what Burnstein and Vinokur (1974) added is that, in general, this shift happens either because there is a higher number of arguments or because these arguments are more convincing.

What is interesting is that there are numbers of researches that do not consider this third thesis as a separate explanation for group polarization since it has a close relationship both with the social comparison theory and the cognitive learning theory. Furthermore, according to many scholars, for example St. Jean and Percival (1974) and Wallach and Kogan (1965), knowing others' positions is not a sufficient condition for the phenomenon of polarization to happen. For this reason, on many occasions, this theory is either ignored or included in the social comparison and in the cognitive learning theories. However, by looking at the experiments that these four authors conducted, what can be seen is that they manipulated the mechanisms they have used in order to obtain the results that they needed. In fact, on one hand, in St. John and Percival's paper, the participants were exposed to an extreme position which was portrayed as the group's position. However, this is a well-known manipulation technique which 'produce[s] conformity pressures and lead to convergence on a majority or consensus group norm' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 319). On the other hand, in the research made by Wallach and Kogan the participants had first to record themselves and then to explain to the group their positions. This is another way to manipulate the people involved in the experiment since it links a person to a particular opinion and this 'can inhibit their susceptibility to social influence and response change' (Fitzpatrick, 1989, page 319). Furthermore, another critic that was made to the persuasive argument theory concerns the fact that individuals 'are likely to be exposed to persuasive arguments that favour their initial position. [...] There is a tendency to sample information that is consistent with our own point of view' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 85). However, a number of scholars are against this assumption since they believe that there is a clear linkage between the knowledge of others' positions, both when these positions are similar or very different from a person's initial idea, and group polarization. For this reason, many studies were developed whose aim was to prove this idea. This can be seen, for instance, in the research made by Myers and Lamm (1976) and by Pruitt (1971): in their papers, in fact, they focused on the impact that being informed about the others' points of view can have on an individual. In this way, they both highlighted the fact that, simply by exchanging persuasive arguments and by sharing ideas, social comparison and cognitive learning are likely to happen and polarization occurs too. This idea can be found even in the thesis promoted by Burnstein and Vinokur (1974). In fact, these two scholars, through an experiment, were able to collect data which show that, in the majority of the cases, the group discussion and the consequent understanding of others' points of view constitutes a sufficient conditions for changing preferences and for taking into consideration options which can be even far from an individual's original idea. Finally, this idea was sustained even by Allen and Wilder (1980): indeed, they stated that 'exposure to others' positions, in addition to stimulating thoughtful analysis of available evidence, can also cause group members to reinterpret, or cognitively restructure, key aspects of the issue'.

In conclusion, some of the assumptions that can be derived from the discourse linked with the phenomenon of group polarization are the following:

1. The group discussion is a fundamental element in all the theories that were created for the explanation of this phenomenon since it polarizes the members' positions;
2. There is a higher probability for subjective judgements to change rather than the objective ones;
3. It can be explained in three possible ways which are different but all interconnected between each other (Fitzpatrick, 1989).

#### *2.4.3 – Choice Shift and Group Polarization: similarities and differences*

Group polarization and choice shift are, without any doubt, the two answers that are most sustained by scholars when it comes to discuss the risk-taking behaviour of groups. However, what can be easily seen is that these are two phenomena which are quite similar. For example, one common characteristic concerns the results obtained after the experiments: in both cases, in fact, the majority of scholars agree on the extremity of groups' behaviours rather than on their risk-seeking attitudes. Furthermore, in both cases, the group discussion plays a fundamental role since it is at the origin either of the group polarization or of the cautious/risky shift. Moreover, for both these theories, the scholars' main instrument to prove the validity of their ideas was the creation of social experiments based on choice dilemmas. Among them, the most famous and used one is undoubtedly the Choice Dilemma Questionnaire described by Wallach et al (1963). In fact, even though it was born in order to explain only the risky shift theory, this methodology was analysed and taken as starting point in the majority of the studies regarding both group polarization and choice shift. However, this aspect, according to Krizan and Baron (2007), can be seen as a weakness of both these theories. Indeed, what can be stated is that the CDQ is not able to really involve the respondents and this, in turn, leads to results which can be only partially true. In fact, the Choice Dilemma Questionnaire is a questionnaire that was created ad hoc in laboratory in order to study the risk-taking behaviours of groups and individuals. However, the main problem is that the ingroup status is only temporary and that the situations described are only hypothetical. Indeed, 'it is unlikely [...] that subjects will reveal their actual risk attitudes in response to hypothetical questions' (Nieboer, 2013, page 10). Moreover, in the studies involving the CDQ, outgroups are rarely mentioned and ingroup/outgroup differences are never taken into consideration (Krizan and Baron, 2007). Finally, a further possible critic comes from Burnstein and Vinokur (1974). Indeed, what they assume is that:

The subjects must choose the minimum probability of success that he would accept in order to recommend the uncertain alternative. Our conjecture is that choosing a minimum acceptable probability of success requires the individual to organize the facts regarding the alternative courses of action, to weight their importance, and even to make some inferences based on these facts and on his familiarity with similar situations. Hence, individuals are literally engaged in problem-solving rather than in risk-taking behaviour (Burnstein and Vinokur, 1974, page 306).

In this sense, a further weak point of both group polarization and choice shift, according to Krizan and Baron (2007), regards the idea to take, as basic unit of analysis, the group discussion. Indeed, it can lead to 'overly conservative statistical conclusions' (Krizan and Baron, 2007, page 195). Furthermore, another possible limit for both these theories regards the groups' tendency to exacerbate individual biases. In fact, the level of group bias depends on four factors: (i) the type of bias, (ii) the group decision-making process, (iii) the strength of the bias, and (iv) the preference distribution of the group members (Kerr et al, 1996 in Kerr and Tindale, 2004). A different perspective over this issue was given by Tindale (1993). Indeed, he said that there can be an 'attenuation or exacerbation of a particular bias depending on how prevalent the bias is at the individual level' (page 112). However, what they all concluded is that '[individual] biases may also influence the group decision processes' (Kerr and Tindale, 2004, page 634). In this sense, since that, both in the group polarization and in the choice shift phenomena, what individuals think and believe is fundamental, what can be assumed is that the results obtained through experiments are not completely reliable. In conclusion, what can be said is that 'groups can bring out the worst as well as the best in man. [...] madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups' (Janis, 1972, page 3).

However, even though group polarization and choice shift have a high number of common characteristics, one difference is important to highlight as well. This difference concerns the fact that group polarization is a phenomenon which occurs at the individual level while choice shift happens at the group level (Hinsz and Davis, 1984). Indeed, within the framework of group polarization, what is taken into consideration are the changes in each person's opinions, which happen at the individual level. On the other hand, with choice shift, the main focus is the change in the whole group's behaviour. In this sense, the group is taken as a block and all the people within it contribute to this shift. What is interesting is that, in order to prove this difference between group polarization and choice shift, Hinsz and Davis (1984) organized an experiment in which they took into consideration four factors: number of arguments, persuasiveness of arguments, order of the dilemma items and the difference between individuals and groups. During this experiment, 320 students participated and

each one of them had to face two different choice dilemma items, one risky and the other cautious. The two scholars, in this way, were able to find out that, ‘For the risky item, both the Number and Persuasiveness of Arguments significantly influenced polarization. However, only the Persuasiveness of Arguments had a significant effect on choice shift’ (Hinsz and Davis, 1984, page 267). Moreover, this difference between group polarization and choice shift is relevant even because, as Hinsz and Davis (1984) stated, ‘groups and individuals may use information differently when making judgements’ (page 262). In this sense, another characteristic that is important to highlight is that, when the decisions are taken by groups, there is the tendency to underuse the available information. This theory was sustained even by Kerr and Tindale (2004) who, in their study, said that ‘groups were less-than-optimal users of information and often would ignore information that was not widely shared among the members’ (page 633).

#### *2.4.4 - Groupthink*

Groupthink is the third most accepted answer that was given by the scholars in order to assess groups’ behaviours. It is a phenomenon that was developed by Janis in 1972 whose main attempt is, by looking at groups’ characteristics, to give a valid explanation for the occurrence of some historical and international events, e.g., the Bay of Pigs invasion. Janis original explanation of the term was the following:

I use the term “groupthink” as a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative course of action. [...] Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures (Janis, 1972, page 9).

By reading this definition, what can be understood is that, according to Janis, the main cause for the development of the phenomenon of groupthink is the group’s cohesiveness which results in its inability to critically evaluate all the possible alternatives to solve a specific problem. Said with other words, ‘groupthink is concurrence-seeking that interferes with adequate consideration of decision alternatives, which in turn leads to poor decisions’ (McCauley, 1989, page 251). Another way of seeing this phenomenon was given by Tetlock (1979): groupthink, in his vision, occurs when ‘independent critical analysis of the problem facing the group assumes second place to group members’ motivation to maintain group solidarity’ (page 1314).

In general terms, it is important to highlight that each group possesses two important characteristics: on one side, the group’s composition, which regards the features of its members in

terms of sex, religion, ethnicity, age and so forth (Cottam et al, 2004). On the other side, the second characteristic concerns the group's structure, that considers factors such as the status, the roles, the norms and the presence of cohesion between the members (Cottam et al, 2004). This last feature is particularly important: it has been proved, in fact, that cohesive groups perform better than the non-cohesive ones. This is due to the fact that, on one hand, they facilitate the exchange of information and the discussion and, on the other hand, they are able to create more alternatives to solve the problems ('t Hart, 1991). For this reasons, according to Mullen & Copper (1994), cohesive groups can be considered as more efficient decision-makers than the non-cohesive ones. However, Janis' thesis highlights the fact that high levels of cohesion can be even counterproductive. In fact, cohesion 'may become a value in itself for each of the members, [...] they may be reluctant to say or do anything that might disturb it [...]. Furthermore, It may even affect (delimit) their capacity to think critically' ('t Hart, 1991, page 254). The logic behind this idea is easy: if a group is cohesive, it follows that the group's members will be satisfied and that they will struggle in order to remain within it and to maintain their positions. This, in turn, will push the members to conform to the group's behaviour and beliefs and to suppress any critical thought in order to avoid the creation of disunity. Consequently, according to Janis, the group will be even more incline to take risky decisions. For these reasons, as Janis noted in his book, to adhere to the group's norms is not always beneficial for the quality of the group's performance since that these rules can contribute, in the long-term, to decrease the group's productivity. Moreover, another characteristic of cohesive groups concerns the fact that 'the more cohesive the group and the more relevant the issue to the goals of the group, the greater is the inclination of the members to reject a nonconformist' (Janis, 1972, page 5). Finally, another feature that is important to consider regards the effects of stress to group cohesion. In general, the thesis supported by the majority of scholars concerns the fact that, during crisis, the cohesiveness of the group increases. Janis contributed to the further development of this idea by saying that, in periods of stress, even though the group fails to achieve its primary goals, its level of cohesion will not change and, in some cases, it will even increase. For all these reasons, the main thesis promoted by Janis in his book concerns the fact that:

The more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against out-groups (Janis, 1972, page 13).

In order to understand the characteristics of this phenomenon, Janis, in his book, decided to analyse different important historical situations in which, according to him, groupthink occurred.

These events are, for example, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Vietnam War, the Cuban Missile crisis and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. In this way, Janis was able to give an answer to three important and basic questions linked with this phenomenon: who, how and when does groupthink occur? First, in order to understand who is more likely to be susceptible to this phenomenon, Janis' starting assumption is that what matters is not only the nationality of the policy-makers but also their personality. In fact, 'Groups of individuals showing a preponderance of certain personality and social attributes may prove to be the ones that succumb most readily to groupthink' (Janis, 1972, page 192). The second question concerns the understanding of how widespread is this phenomenon. In this context, Janis does not have a precise answer since that, in order to calculate the percentage of bad political decisions that can be linked with groupthink, more data are needed. Finally, the third and most important question concerns when does groupthink occur. According to Janis (1972), there are higher probabilities that this phenomenon will occur when there are 'situational circumstances and structural features of the group that make it easy for the symptoms to become dominant' (page 197). By reading this statement, what can be said is that, on one hand, there are three possible antecedent conditions for the outbreak of the phenomenon of groupthink. These are, first, the presence of a high level of cohesion among the members of the group. Second, the existence of structural faults of the context in which the group works. Third, the presence of a leader who pushes towards his preferred solution. This last situation can occur even when 'the leader does not want the members to be yes-men and the individual members try to resist conformity' (Janis, 1972, page 197). On the other hand, Janis recognizes the existence of eight major symptoms of groupthink:

1. Excessive levels of optimism derived from a wrong perception of invulnerability;
2. Increasing attempts towards rationalization;
3. Group members' belief in their morality which leads them not to consider the possible consequences of their decisions;
4. The existence of stereotypes about outgroups;
5. Strong opposition against those group's members who express opinions which are in contrast with the general group's ideas and beliefs;
6. Self-censorship;
7. The presence of a common but false idea of unanimity among group's members;
8. The creation of people which self-nominate guards in order to protect the group from information which can break the equilibrium of the group itself (Janis, 1972).

However, even though Janis' theory about groupthink has found an immediate support from scholars and researchers all over the world, a first possible weakness of this phenomenon concerns

the fact that it lacks a real-world application ('t Hart, 1991). As McCauley (1989) noticed, in fact, very little researches were done in order to verify Janis' theory about groupthink. Indeed, the majority of the scholars simply paraphrased Janis' work without adding anything; only few of them have tried to apply this theory to other political events. Some examples are Green and Connolly's (1974) and Raven's (1974) papers who tried to apply groupthink principles to the Watergate scandal. At the end, what Raven (1974) discovered was that, during that crisis, only some of the preconditions for groupthink were really present but other, such as the group cohesiveness, were missing. Other attempts were made by Smith (1985), who analysed the Iranian Hostage crisis, and by Rosenthal (1984), who, in turn, tried to link groupthink with some crisis that happened in the Netherlands. However, both these studies, as 't Hart (1991) noted, were not successful since that 'they are all very causal and lacking in psychological proficiency' (page 261). Furthermore, another scholar which tried to apply the phenomenon of groupthink to real cases was Tetlock (1979). In this study, the final results were mixed: in part they were consistent with Janis' research and in part they were not. In fact, by looking at the content of the public speeches made by some members of the US government he understood that 'groupthink decision makers were more simplistic in their perceptions of policy issues and made more positive reference to the United States and its allies' (Tetlock, 1979, page 1314). Clearly, this discovery sustains Janis' theory. However, it was noticed even that 'groupthink decision makers did not make significantly more negative references to communist states and their allies' (Tetlock, 1979, page 1314). This, of course, is against the principles of groupthink. Finally, other two scholar who, in their paper, tried to apply the idea of groupthink to a real-case event were Whyte and Levi (1994). In this paper, they tried to analyse the decision-making process and the risk-taking behaviour of the US Executive Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. At the end, what they discovered was that:

groupthink provides the mechanisms to explain the convergence of group members' views on a poor choice, but the theory provides no clue as to the initial positions of group members at the outset of discussion, from which a consensus is usually forged (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 257).

Moreover, since, according to Janis, cohesion is the most important element in order for groupthink to happen, what Rajakumar (2018) assumes is that most of the experiments that were conducted until now are based on data which are not reliable. This is a second major weakness of the groupthink phenomenon as it was developed by Janis. In fact, what can be said is that there are different techniques that can be used in order to test Janis' theory. Among them, according to Tetlock (1979), the most utilized are, on one hand, the organization of simulations to be made in laboratory and, on the other hand, the study of archives in order to assess how the decision-makers actually took



the decision. However, when they used the first method, scholars simply said to the participants that they were a group with a high level of cohesion which had to solve a particular problem. However, cohesion can be created only after several years of working together; therefore, it is impossible to create artificially this condition.

A third possible weakness was defined by Whyte (1989): he sustains the idea that, among all the antecedent conditions of groupthink, 'only group cohesiveness and leader behaviour are group-level constraints that identify groupthink as a group [...] phenomenon' (page 52). However, group cohesiveness is not a necessary precondition for this phenomenon to occur; according to Whyte (1989), in fact, all depends on the way in which the problem is framed during the group discussion. This thesis is sustained even by Kerr and Tindale (2004). In fact, 'groups can make disappointingly poor decisions without being highly cohesive, having strong and directive leaders, or feeling a sense of urgency' (Kerr and Tindale, 2004, page 640). This idea was further sustained in the experiment organized by Flowers (1977). In particular, he used two variables, namely leadership style and group cohesiveness, in order to verify Janis' theory. The starting hypothesis was that 'high cohesiveness/closed leadership variant would most likely be characterized by groupthink' ('t Hart, 1991, page 263). 120 college students took part to the experiment: they were divided into 40 groups, which were all composed by three persons and a leader, and each of them had to analyse a case study in 30 minutes and take a decision (Rajakumar, 2018). At the end, what Flowers concluded was that groups with closed leadership presented less solutions and utilized less facts, which are both signs of the presence of groupthink. However, 'there was an almost negligible effect of cohesiveness on both outcome variables' (Rajakumar, 2018, page 24). In other words, this means that cohesion is not a fundamental variable since that the phenomenon of groupthink can occur even without it.

Furthermore, Whyte, in his paper, underlines even the fact that Janis' theory does not help to really understand group dynamics, particularly when this theory is compared with choice shift or group polarization phenomena. This idea was sustained even by 't Hart (1991): in his paper he underlines that, although Janis' hypothesis is that groups tend to be risk-takers, he did not give enough support to this thesis. This, in turn, did not lead to the development of further studies and experiments on this topic. For this reason, a further critic concerns the fact that 'using groupthink to explain policy debacles provides only a partial explanation' (Whyte, 1989). In fact, in his paper, Whyte (1989) decided to apply the prospect theory in order to fill the gaps left by Janis' theory since that 'groups will amplify the behavioural tendencies on which prospect theory is founded' (page 51).

Finally, another possible critic comes from McCauley's (1989) paper in which he focused especially on compliance. The main question is whether compliance, defined as the presence of a public agreement without the private one, can be compared with internalization in terms of importance. Another possible way to define compliance is the following: 'compliance occurs when a powerful member of the group asks a less powerful member [...] to do something, and the member does what is asked' (Cottam et al, 2004, page 73). The starting point of this thesis is the definition of cohesion: 'for an individual, cohesion is experienced as the individual's overall attraction to the group' (McCauley, 1989, page 251). Another possible definition of cohesion was provided by Rajakumar (2018): 'cohesion in the context of groupthink refers to the attraction to the group and the desire to continue being a member' (page 20). However, Janis did not stop to this definition; he added that cohesion occurs when there is a sense of solidarity among the group's members. For this reason, Janis assumed that, if cohesion increases, compliance will decrease. In this sense, there is a sort of inversely proportional relationship between cohesion and compliance. However, according to McCauley, there is no evidence for this assumption and, conversely, he believes that an increase in cohesion will, in general, lead to an increase in compliance. Resuming, according to this second hypothesis, a direct proportional relation exists between compliance and cohesion. What is interesting is that, in order to prove the validity of this theory, McCauley analysed each case-study described by Janis. For example, he reviewed the case of the Bay of Pigs invasion and he said that evidences of compliance can be found in the different explanations that Janis himself gave for the final decision to invade Cuba. Among these explanations there are, for example, the existence of a tendency towards self-censorship and the fact that the cabinet members did not want to lose their positions. On one side, Janis' point of view in this regard was that 'the members of the policy group [...] would be unlikely to simply comply' (Rajakumar, 2018, page 20). However, McCauley's conclusion was that the compliance to a norm adopted by a powerful leader, in this case President Kennedy, in the context of a more or less cohesive group was 'certainly part of the decision-making pathology' (McCauley, 1989, page 254). What can be said is that some weaknesses can be found even in this approach considering that, at the end, McCauley was able to apply this theory only in two out of six cases originally analysed by Janis (Rajakumar, 2018).

## *2.5 - Conclusions*

In conclusion, what can be assumed is that the importance of the decision-making processes developed by groups should not be underestimated and, on the contrary, more studies should take into consideration this aspect. For example, a debate which is fundamental for the understanding of this thesis concerns the group performance and how groups combine the members' preferences. In

this sense, group performance is usually seen as ‘a positive function of its members’ abilities’ which, in turn, is directly linked with the size of the group itself (Yetton and Bottger, 1983, page 145). Concerning the issue of group performance, a theory that is worth to mention is the Social Decision Scheme. Summarizing, ‘A social decision scheme is a rule or procedure by which the group combines a distribution of member preferences in a collective group response’ (Laughlin, 2011, page 68). In this sense, according to a number of scholars that analysed this theory, there are two possible ways for the group to take decisions: the majority-wins rule or the truth-wins rule (Stasser, Kerr and Davis, 1989 in Cottam et al, 2004; Tindale, 1993). In the first case, the final decision corresponds to the position which is supported by the majority of group’s members. In the second case, ‘group members tend to be persuaded by the truth of a particular position (Cottam et al, 2004, page 79). In particular, what some scholars, such as Cottam et al (2004) and Argote et al (1990), believe is that groups tend to make better decisions than the single individuals since that they can use all the resources that each single person can offer. Furthermore, the principle according to which ‘two heads are better than one’ is perceived as another possible reason to explain why groups are better decision-makers. Moreover, as Argote et al (1990) underlined, groups perform better than individuals even because, on one hand, they are less biased and, on the other hand, they are able to ‘cancel the errors of individual members’ (page 297). However, this idea is not shared by Kerr and Tindale (2004): they stated that group decisions can ‘lead to both good versus poor performance, depending on the context in which that process is enabled’ (page 641). This thesis was sustained even by Whyte (1993): indeed, in his paper, he said that ‘Groups may perform better than individuals on some tasks, but decision making in escalating situations is apparently not one of them’ (page 446). This idea was supported even by Tindale (1993) who, through the organization of three different experiments, managed to explain that groups, in general, make more extreme errors compared to individuals. Moreover, he underlines that ‘groups make less errors on problem-solving tasks yet make more errors [...] on decision-making tasks’ (Tindale, 1993, page 121). The fact that groups can perform worse compared to individuals, according to them, depends mainly on the possibility that some phenomena, namely groupthink, group polarization and choice shift, will happen. What is interesting to say is that this second hypothesis can be sustained in particular if some important historical events, e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis, the attack on Pearl Harbour or the Iraqi invasion, are taken into consideration. Moreover, in order to understand why these decisions were taken, a fundamental aspect that should be taken into account is represented by the groups’ attitude towards risk. Indeed, in order to prevent poor and potentially-disastrous decisions to be taken again in the future, this aspect must be considered and more studies should be developed on this issue.

By linking together all these ideas four important things can be assumed. First, since governments have always to face the unknown, their decisions, according to the Prospect theory, are driven more by emotions and beliefs than by real knowledge. This, in turn, occurs when dealing both with internal and external problems. Second, since decision-makers never have all the information, they need to understand which type of knowledge can be applied in situations of uncertainty but, in most of the cases, this knowledge will be imperfect. Indeed, nowadays what can be said is that:

Transboundary and collectively relevant risk problems such as global environmental threats (climate change, loss of biological diversity, chemical pollution, etc.), new and/or large-scale technologies (nanotechnology, biotechnology, offshore oil production, etc.), food security, or pandemics are all characterized by limited and sometimes controversial knowledge with respect to their risk properties and their implications (Klinke and Renn, 2011, page 3).

Moreover, this idea can be linked with the first point since that the 'void' left by the absence of information will be filled with beliefs and subjective ideas that, in turn, will become the main driver of the decision-makers. Third, due to the imperfect information, on many occasions the governments' final decisions can be considered as a sort of bet. Indeed, these decisions are derived from quantitative and qualitative analysis made by the members of the group but nobody knows for sure which will be the consequences. Fourth, there is not a consensus among scholars regarding the way in which groups take decisions at the national and international levels in situation of uncertainty. For this reason, researchers, taking as a starting point the assumptions provided either by the Prospect theory or by Allison's theory, provided many different explanations and theories. The three most accredited ones are choice shift, group polarization and groupthink. However, they are all based on ideas developed some decades ago and on experiments whose data, in many cases, were manipulated. For this reason, the main point here is to understand whether the main assumptions of these three theories concerning the group's attitude towards risk are right or wrong. Consequently, the main question in this thesis will be the following: are groups always risk-taking actors during international crises?

## CHAPTER 2 – CASE STUDIES

As it was underlined in the first chapter of this thesis, nowadays there is not yet a consensus about the general groups' attitude towards risk. Indeed, when it comes to understand the single individuals' attitude towards risk, the majority of scholars agree that it all depends on how the person frames the problem and if he/she perceive himself/herself to be in a domain of losses or of gains. However, for what concerns groups, many diverging theories and ideas exist. In particular, the explanation of level of risk accepted by groups become especially difficult when important political decisions, whose consequences will reverberate throughout the whole international arena, have to be taken by national governments. On one hand, a high number of scholars believe that groups tend to be more risk-seeking compared to individuals. For this reason, researchers during the years developed a wide range of experiments in order to prove and sustain this theory. In this sense, it is worth to remind, first, the risky shift phenomenon and the Choice Dilemma Questionnaire (CDQ) developed by Wallach, Kogan and Bem in 1963 and, second, Janis' Groupthink. Indeed, they are probably the most successful attempts in the demonstration of this risk-taking behaviour of groups. However, these two phenomena share a fundamental weak point: they both lack a clear scientific support in real-life situations. In fact, when scholars tried to apply these concepts to some relevant historical events, what they found out was that these theories could be successfully applied only in few real international cases. This can be seen, for instance, if Janis' theory is considered: in fact, the Groupthink theory managed to be applied only in the six case-studies described in his book. For this reason, today a growing number of scholars consider the choice shift and the group polarization phenomena as more valuable explanations for groups' behaviour and attitude towards risk. In this context, the most important element is the discussion that takes place among the members of the group since it is really able to change each individuals' beliefs and ideas over a particular issue. In other words, according to these two theories, groups take not only riskier but also more cautious decisions; for this reason, they are more extreme decision-makers.

By considering all these elements, what can be said is that the aim of this second chapter will be to try to give an answer to the following questions: Which is the general groups' tendency towards risk? Is it possible to assume that they are, in the great majority of the cases, risk-takers actors or is it better to simply say that they take more extreme decisions (both in a risky and cautious direction)? In order to reach this goal, the chosen methodology consists in the analysis of two opposite case-studies linked with two of the most important historical events of the twentieth century: the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbour. The main aim will be, for each case-study, to create a general historical overview and a comparison between the already existing studies which takes into

consideration the level of risk during these events. In this way, it will be possible to see which elements guided the different national governments towards the undertaking of some particular decisions and which role played risk in both these two cases. In particular, in order to create a more complete analysis, in both case-studies the same three theories will be applied: the Prospect theory, the Groupthink theory and the Three Models theory. In this way, different perspectives, theories and points of view will be considered and, at the end, a more precise answer will be given.

In this sense, by considering the assumptions described in the first chapter concerning these three theories, what can be said is that, in general, the Prospect theory should be the easiest to apply to these two cases. Indeed, this is the theory that is most accredited among scholars and the one that, from a theoretical point of view, can better fit the scope of this thesis since its statements are the clearest and the most well-defined. In particular, if it is true the idea according to which being in a domain of losses leads to the adoption of the riskiest options while being in a domain of gains leads to more cautious decisions, what can be stated is that, both in the Cuban Missile Crisis and in the attack on Pearl Harbor, there should be a risky shift and, in general, the adoption of the riskiest solutions. In fact, both the presence of the Soviet missiles in Cuba and the possibility of a Japanese attack directly against the US territory are situations which, in theory, should be framed in a negative way by the governments involved in each of these crises. This, in turn, should lead to risky decisions. Moreover, this statement should be confirmed even by the idea of loss aversion: in fact, since individuals do not want to lose, it follows that groups' members will do whatever is necessary to win and to re-establish the status quo.

Second, by taking into consideration the Groupthink hypothesis, what can be stated is that, in theory, the decision to adopt a risky or a cautious solution in the two international crises analysed depends only on the level of cohesion developed by the group under analysis. In fact, from a theoretical perspective, if the government forms a cohesive group, it means that there is a high probability that it will develop some symptom of groupthink and, thus, that it will take risky decisions.

Finally, if Allison's theory is used to analyse these two case-studies, it is important, first of all, to understand which are the most relevant aspects of each one of his three Models. In fact, since that the most relevant aspect of Model I is rationality, what can be argued is that the governments involved in these two crises simply chose in a rational way the alternatives that they perceived better in order to minimize the costs and to increase the gains. On the other hand, by considering Model II, the final decisions in both these cases should have been derived simply by the following of standard patterns of behaviour by the organizations involved. In other words, this means that, in the past, the organizations should have solved another international dispute following a similar behaviour. Finally, according to Model III, the decision to adopt a cautious or a risky solution in these two crises should

have been dependent on the desires of the individuals that, within the government, managed to impose their points of view.

The structure of this second chapter is simple. The first case to be analysed will be the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. Therefore, the overview will begin with a general analysis of the main facts and characteristics of this international crisis. Thus, the main actors and events will be described and, at the end, the main aim will be to understand why this international crisis occurred and how it developed. This will be helpful in order to understand the second part of this analysis that, in turn, takes into consideration the level of risk accepted by the US in 1962. In this sense, the possible solutions at the disposal of the Executive Committee will be presented and this, in turn, will be the starting point for the application of the different theories concerning risk. The first theory to be applied will be the Prospect theory and it will be based on the paper written by Whyte and Levi in 1994. The second will be Janis' idea about Groupthink and, finally, Allison's Models I, II and III will be considered. Then, in the subsequent section, a similar structure will be followed for the explanation of the attack on Pearl Harbor of 1941. In fact, even in this second case the analysis will begin with a general description of the main historical facts and characteristics of this crisis. Then, similarly to the paragraph concerning the Cuban Missile Crisis, the different alternatives that the Japanese administration had to solve this crisis will be presented. Moreover, even in this case, three theories will be considered: the first one is the Prospect theory with Levi and Whyte's paper as starting point, the second is the Groupthink theory based on Janis' book and the third one is Russett's Rational Model Theory. However, what can be said is that this second case will be different from the first one because both the Japanese and the American perspectives will be considered. Indeed, both administrations played an important role during this crisis and they both accepted a certain level of risk. Finally, at the end of the chapter, after the analysis of both cases, the results obtained from this comparison will be described and explained.

### *3.1 – The Cuban Missile Crisis*

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the most dangerous events of the Cold War. Indeed, it was a moment in which the level of tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States increased substantially and, consequently, the fear of a nuclear war was very high all over the world. As Allison (1969) stated, 'For thirteen days of October 1962, there was a higher probability that more human lives would end suddenly than ever before in history' (page 689). Indeed, as many scholars underlined in recent years, it was not only an event which led the world to fear an actual nuclear disaster but it was even the only event of this kind. According to Blight et al (1987), in fact, this crisis represented

‘the closest point that the world has come to nuclear war’ (page 170). Indeed, it was the first and only moment during and after the Cold War in which people around the world really thought that a nuclear war was about to come. In this sense, what can be stated is that, if this would have happened, it would have meant ‘the death of 100 million Americans, over 100 million Russians, and millions of Europeans as well’ (Allison, 1969, page 689). Therefore, due to the great importance of this event, what can be underlined is that nowadays it is probably the most studied crisis in history. Indeed, especially for international relations scholars, the Cuban Missile Crisis is a milestone: ‘is central to debates about decision-making, nuclear proliferation, and deterrence’ (Laffey and Weldes, 2008). Considering all these elements, what can be concluded is that the analysis of this event is fundamental for this thesis since it can be useful for the understanding of small groups’ dynamics in situations of risk. In particular, the main aim will be to explain, by comparing the different theories applied by scholars to explain this crisis, why the events evolved in the way in which they did. In fact, what is interesting about this crisis is that, at the end, the final outcome consisted in the establishment of a US naval blockade in order to stop other Soviet ships to arrive in Cuba and, in the meanwhile, in the searching for some compromise solutions. Thus, there was a cautious shift within the US. However, if there would have been the opposite outcome, so a risky shift, the result would have been completely different and much more dangerous. Indeed, in all likelihood, there would have been a direct US attack against Cuba which, in consequence, would have led to the beginning of a nuclear war and the destruction of many areas not only within the US and the Soviet Union but even in Europe. Consequently, the real question is why, at the end, there was a cautious shift and not a risky shift? Which were the factors that, according to the scholars, played a role in changing decision-makers’ points of view in this decision?

### *3.1.1 – Historical Overview*

This potentially-catastrophic event began on October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1962 when the US president John F. Kennedy received evidence, thanks to a U2 secret flyover mission, of the Soviet Union attempt to place nuclear missiles in Cuba. On one hand, from the United States perspective, this situation was ‘classified as offensive by the administration and, therefore, President Kennedy had no other option than to act’ (Medland, 1990, page 434). In this sense, the first decision regarded the creation of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm): a group of Kennedy’s advisers that had the role of discussing the possible actions to be taken in order to solve this crisis. What can be said is that, at the beginning, immediately after the discovery, the majority of the members of the ExComm and President Kennedy were in favour of an air strike in order to destroy the missiles. Only few of them would have preferred to use a more diplomatic approach. However, the main problem



linked with this violent solution was that ‘An attack without warning would not be understood by the world and, furthermore, the option of an air strike or an invasion would run counter to American tradition’ (Medland, 1990, page 434). Moreover, this solution could have led the Soviets to react in a harsh and violent way that would have brought the world into a nuclear war. For these reasons, after a week of secret discussions among the ExComm members, on 22<sup>nd</sup> October they decided to publicly announce ‘the discovery to the world and imposed a naval blockade on further shipments of armaments to Cuba’ (Allison, 2012, page 11). In this way, the United States could count on a more controlled escalation of violence and posed Khrushchev in the position of being the first to adopt an aggressive solution. However, the problem with this decision was that it was aimed both at preventing other weapons to reach Cuba and at showing to the Soviet Union the strength of the United States. In this sense, it was a ‘strong message of commitment’ (Jervis, 2015, page 14). This, consequently, brought ‘the world under the cloud of a possible nuclear war’ since that, during the week which followed, the tensions between Kennedy and Khrushchev reached the highest levels (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 247). Therefore, in general terms, what is interesting to underline about this crisis, which can be applied both to the US and the Soviet leaders, is that:

if you are not prepared to risk war, even nuclear war, an adroit adversary can get you to back down in successive confrontations. If you do have redlines that would lead to war if crossed, then you have to communicate them credibly to your adversary and back them up or risk having your threats dismissed (Allison, 2012, page 15).

On the other hand, what is interesting is the fact that Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, was the first one who had the idea of placing the missiles in Cuba. This, in his view, would have been positive for the Soviet position as superpower: in fact, on one hand, they could have given support to Cuba and, in this way, they could have strengthened their relationship as allies. On the other hand, the United States would have been directly threatened by these missiles since that they were placed ‘90 miles off the United States’ coast’ (Allison, 2012, page 11). What is interesting to notice is that Khrushchev’s original plan was to bring and install the missiles in Cuba quickly and in secret. At first, throughout the summer of 1962, the Soviets managed to maintain this operation unrevealed: on 8<sup>th</sup> September the first Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) arrived in Cuba and this, in turn, signed the beginning of the so-called operation Anadyr. However, at the end, the fact that the number of Soviet Union cargos towards Cuba were increasing was noted by the members of CIA, who started to be suspicious. Despite this, maintaining the advantage that the USSR had gained by being involved in a US neighbouring country was essential from Khrushchev’s point of view. For this reason, at the beginning of the crisis, the Soviet Union main position can be seen in the refusal to withdraw the

missiles from Cuba. Moreover, they wanted the United States to agree to ‘the partial Soviet missile deployment already in Cuba’ (Garthoff, 1992, page 47). However, for obvious reasons, the US did not want to accept this conditions and, in fact, from October 22<sup>nd</sup> to October 25<sup>th</sup>, ‘Khrushchev and Kennedy traded intransigent letters in which neither showed any sign of backing down’ (Roberts, 2012, page 199). However, in this context it is important to consider that, even though the blockade was successful in not letting the Soviet armaments to reach Cuba, the works in the island did not stop and, consequently, the missiles that were already in Cuba were about to become operational. The direct consequence of this, in turn, is that, by October 26<sup>th</sup>, the United States were ready to conduct a military attack over the island, and both Cuba and the Soviet Union were informed and worried about this. In particular, this deepening of the crisis was due to two letters that Khrushchev sent to Kennedy: in the first one, which was sent on October 26<sup>th</sup> and that found the US agreement, the Soviet leader proposed to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for the US commitment not to invade Cuba. However, in the second letter, that arrived in the US the day after, the Soviets tried to change the terms of the agreement: they wanted not only the US to commit not to invade Cuba, but also the removal of its missiles from Turkey. This, in turn, was not acceptable for the US. Consequently, according to Allison (2012), the solutions proposed to Kennedy by the ExComm in those days were only two: to attack Cuba or to accept the presence of the Soviet missiles in the island.

At the end, Kennedy refused both options and, on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1962, the United States and Soviet Union managed, thanks to a series of back channel negotiations between Robert Kennedy and Anatoli Dobrynin, to reach a compromise. On one hand, Khrushchev accepted to withdraw the missiles from Cuba. On the other hand, Kennedy publicly agreed to not invade Cuba and, only in a private agreement, he committed to withdraw the missiles from Turkey. In fact, as Garthoff (1992) stated, ‘An American pledge not to invade Cuba would obviate the need for Soviet missiles in Cuba and, by implication, they could be withdrawn’ (page 47). What is interesting in this regard is Allison’s (2012) explanation of this final decision. In fact, he explains that it was a compromise composed of three features:

1. A public agreement according to which the United States promised not to invade Cuba if the Soviet Union would have withdrawn the missiles from Cuba;
2. A private ultimatum sent to Khrushchev by Kennedy in which the US President threatened to invade Cuba within 24 hours if Khrushchev would have refused the offer described in point 1;
3. A ‘secret sweetener that promised the withdrawal of the US missiles from Turkey within six months’ (Allison, 2012, page 12).

What can be easily noted by analysing this agreement is that, on one hand, both the US and the Soviet Union won since they obtained what they really wanted: the dismantle of the missiles in Cuba and in Turkey. In particular, what is interesting is that they shifted from a bargaining approach, which entails only win-lose solutions, to a problem-solving approach, which permits to find win-win solutions. This change in both of Khrushchev's and Kennedy's attitude led not only to solve peacefully the dispute but also to what is usually called 'great détente': the longest period of the Cold War in which the two superpowers managed to cooperate and not to fight against each other. Moreover, in order to improve the communications and avoid another crisis like the Cuban Missile Crisis one, they created the 'Washington-Moscow hotline – a teletype machine for direct communications between the president and the general secretary' (Belkin and Blight, 1991, page 733). Furthermore, they signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963 that prohibited nuclear explosions both in the ground and under the water (Belkin and Blight, 1991). However, on the other hand, it appears clear that, at the end, the real loser was Cuba. First, they were never allowed to directly fight for their interests since the Soviets bargained in their name. Second, they lost the protection given by the soviet missiles.

Generally speaking, by analysing the reasons that led the Soviets to place the missiles in Cuba, what can be seen is that they were purely tactical and defensive: first, the need to close the so-called 'missile gap' which made the Soviet Union to perceive their missiles worse than the American ones (Medland, 1990). In fact, at the beginning of 1962, the intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) that the United States had placed in Turkey started to work and, obviously, this was perceived as a threat by the Soviets. Indeed, as White (1996) stated, 'By spring 1962, the Soviet Union's position of nuclear inferiority was common knowledge in the West' (page 61). In this sense, it is important to consider the fact that, even though the Soviet Union in the 1960s had achieved great results in space researches and in the development of nuclear technologies, the US 'have superiority in global political, economic, and military power' (Garthoff, 1992, page 41). Consequently, Khrushchev's decision to place the missiles in Cuba can be seen as a move aiming even at shifting away the attention from some Soviet weaknesses.

The second reason that pushed the Soviet Union to place nuclear missiles in Cuba is directly linked with the relationship that existed between Castro and both the superpowers. First of all, it is important to consider that, after the failed attempt of the United States to invade Cuba, kill Fidel Castro and overthrow the Cuban communist regime in 1961, these two countries started to be hostile to each other. In particular, the tensions increased when the US president Kennedy authorized the Operation Mongoose, aiming at 'harassing, undermining, and optimally overthrowing the Castro

Regime' (Garthoff, 1992, page 42). Second, it is worth to consider even the economic sanctions that the US imposed on Cuba at the beginning of 1962: in fact, there was the establishment of an embargo and the curtailment of trade. Finally, even from the military point of view, the US was creating further plans whose ultimate goal was to attack and invade Cuba. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the relationships between Cuba and the Soviet Union became stronger. In fact, Cuba started to be more and more dependent on the Soviet Union not only from the political and economic point of view but even from a military perspective in order to find protection against the US. Indeed, despite the fact that the US plans for the overthrowing of the Cuban Communist regime were secret, both Cuba and the Soviet Union feared another US invasion. For this reason, what can be concluded is that Khrushchev wanted both to defend Cuba and to extend the Communist influence in a country strategically located within the Western world (Medland, 1990).

Finally, from a historical point of view, in order to successfully analyse this crisis, five factors have to be taken into account. First, it is important to consider that 'before and during the crisis, the leading actors had different degrees of knowledge, ignorance, and misinformation about what was happening' (Jervis, 2015, page 1). In fact, both sides were taken by surprise by the occurrence and the rapid development of the crisis. Second, it is relevant to consider even the fact that 'Khrushchev's decision [...] was an extremely risky one' considering how close they arrived at a nuclear reaction (White, 1996, page 62). Indeed, as Jervis (2015) stated, 'Even if the crisis did bring some gains, the risk was not worth it' (page 1). However, what can be said in this regard is that a similar thesis can be sustained even when talking about President Kennedy. Indeed, as Janis (1972) underlined in his book, the US President's desire to maintain his prestige was extremely dangerous because, at the end, he permitted Khrushchev to decide whether to maintain the peace or to start a nuclear war. Consequently, it was a sort of bet made by Kennedy. Third, due to the high level of uncertainty that followed the discovery of the missiles, both Kennedy and Khrushchev understood that they had to solve this dispute as soon as possible. In this sense, what can be noticed is that the events developed quickly and, at the end, the crisis lasted for only two weeks. However, within these two weeks, what was fundamental for both sides was the understanding of the possible reactions of the other party. Indeed, 'in strategic settings, where my best move depends on your move, knowing what you are likely to do is more helpful than knowing what you should do' (Mercer, 2005, page 16). In this sense, what can be stated is that, during that period, no one claimed to have what game theorists define a 'dominant strategy': a plan 'that would be best no matter how the other played the game' (Jervis, 2015, page 2). Fourth, what is interesting to notice is that today two alternative views exist concerning the consequences of the placement of the missiles in Cuba. These two different perspectives, in turn,

are fundamental since they are the starting point in order to evaluate the decisions and the level of risk accepted both by Kennedy and Khrushchev. On one hand, according to the traditional perspective, ‘The emplacement of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba did alter [...] the status quo of the balance of power’ (Medland, 1990, page 434). On the other hand, from a revisionist point of view, the balance of power had not changed with the presence of the missiles in Cuba because the US nuclear technology was still superior. What can be said is that this last perspective is the most accredited among scholars: in fact, as Haas (2001) stated, ‘the missiles had a relatively negligible impact on the military balance of power’ (page 257). Fifth, it is worth to consider even the marginal role played by Cuba throughout all this crisis. Indeed, Cuba was perceived, in particular by the United States, only as ‘the place in which missiles were deployed by the Soviet Union and from which they had to be removed by the United States’ (Laffey and Weldes, 2008, page 561). What can be easily seen, in fact, is that the crisis developed between the United States and the Soviet Union while Cuba was only a ‘Soviet puppet’ (Laffey and Weldes, 2008, page 561). This tendency can be noted, for example, in the negotiation process: indeed, both the official and the secret negotiations took place respectively between J. Kennedy and Khrushchev and between R. Kennedy and Dobrynin. Castro was never directly involved in this process and there were no other Cuban representatives that could fight for their national interests. In other words, ‘Cuba appeared not as an agent [...], but merely as a place’ (Laffey and Weldes, 2008, page 561). This aspect is relevant because, as Allison (2012) explained in his paper, the crisis would have become much more dangerous if Castro would have been allowed to participate as third player in the negotiation process.

### *3.1.2 – Risk attitude during the Cuban Missile Crisis*

President Kennedy, throughout all this crisis, was aware of the fact that his actions could have increased ‘the risk not only of conventional war but also of nuclear war’ (Allison, 2012, page 14). One concrete proof of this assumption can be seen in the raising of the nuclear alert level to DEFCON 2 in the United States. Moreover, Kennedy himself estimated the probability of having a nuclear war as ‘between 1 out of 3 and even’ (Allison, 1969, page 689). However, this rising in the level of risk can be perceived as a tactic adopted by Kennedy: it consists in increasing the possibility of having a war in the short term period in order to decrease it in the long run. In fact, in the same period, there was the fear of having a war between East and West Germany and the main US attempt was to try to avoid it. Despite this, a general but important assumption that can be made to understand why some decisions were taken by governments when dealing with situations of risk is the following:

Unless the commander in chief has sufficient time and privacy to understand a situation, examine the evidence, explore various options, and reflect before choosing among them, poor decisions are likely (Allison, 2012, page 16).

First of all, in order to properly understand this crisis, it is fundamental to describe the group involved in the decision-making process. The Executive Committee (ExComm) was a group composed of 15 people close to President Kennedy that had the fundamental role of advising him on which decisions had to be taken. These 15 members were the following:

Vice President Lyndon Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Under Secretary of State George Ball, Latin American Assistant Secretary Edwin Martin, Deputy Under Secretary Alexis Johnson, Former Soviet Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, Secretary of Défense Robert McNamara, Deputy Secretary Roswell Gilpatric, Assistant Secretary Paul Nitze and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Maxwell Taylor, CIA Director John McCone, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillion, White House aides McGeorge Bundy and Theodore Sorenson (Marfleet, 2000, page 549).

What is interesting to say about the ExComm is that, according to Blight et al (1987), three different ‘factions’ can be found within it. The first one is the so-called ‘hawkish’ category and its main characteristic was that the members of this faction believed that a military action was needed to solve the crisis. The second, in turn, was the dovish faction and it was the opposite of the hawkish one since the individuals within it believed that they needed to avoid any military action. Finally, Blight et al (1987) defined the third category as owlsh: among its most important members there were Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy and George Ball and its main feature was the desire to use only a soft type of violence to solve the problem.

In second place, what can be said is that, in order to understand the level of risk involved in the decisions taken by the United States during this crisis, it is necessary to analyse the alternative solutions, proposed by the ExComm, that were available to President Kennedy with the aim of ending this crisis. According to Sorensen (2009), there were six possible decisions that could be taken. Each alternative entailed a different level of risk for the United States:

1. The first possible solution was simple and without risks: do nothing and accept the Soviet presence in Cuba;
2. The second alternative that was found concerned the use of the diplomatic instrument against the Soviet Union, e.g., to appeal to the United Nations;

3. To begin secret negotiations with Fidel Castro in order to convince him to withdraw from their alliance with the Soviet Union can be seen as the third option;
4. The fourth choice regarded the adoption of military instruments which do not entail the direct use of the force but which would have limited the USSR ability to help Cuba, for example a blockade or an embargo;
5. The fifth alternative had a high level of risk: it consisted in a direct air strike against Cuba;
6. The last option was the worst in terms of level of risk that it involved: to conduct an invasion against the island in order to subvert Castro's regime (Sorensen, 2009).

Moreover, what is fundamental to say is that, throughout the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, after a resume of the level of risk involved in the initial crisis, a particular attention will be placed on the understanding of the level of risk that the ExComm was willing to adopt to solve the dispute. What is interesting in this sense is that, if the decision-making process during the Cuban Missile Crisis is taken into consideration, different perspectives and points of view should be considered. In particular, there are four scholars whose researches are still widespread since they studied how and why President Kennedy decided to adopt a relatively peaceful solution in this situation of risk: Whyte and Levi (1994), Janis (1972) and Allison (1969). In particular, even though they applied different theories, after the analysis of the decision-taking process they all reached the same conclusion for what concerns the cautious shift of the US government. However, it is interesting to compare all their studies because, in this way, it is possible to underline the fact that there is not a consensus concerning the theories that can be applied to analyse the general groups' tendency towards risk yet. For this reason, there is not one single answer that can be right. In this sense, it is interesting what Allison (1969) said in his paper: 'What each analyst sees and judges to be important is a function not only of the evidence about what happened but also of the "conceptual lenses" through which he looks at the evidence' (page 689). However, what is relevant to underline is that the main problem linked with these three studies is that all of them focused exclusively on the decisions taken by Kennedy and on the level of risk accepted by the US. Indeed, none of them considered the Soviet Union or Cuba.

Concerning these three studies, what can be said is that another element which is important to consider regards the sources that these scholars used to create their theories. First of all, Whyte and Levi (1994), in order to sustain their thesis, decided to use the transcripts of the ExComm meetings only during the first week of the crisis. By adopting this primary source, in turn, they were able to analyse directly what each member of the Executive Committee thought about the different alternatives available to solve the crisis. On the other hand, Janis (1972), in his book, decided to

develop his theory using only secondary sources. In other words, he combined famous historical facts with some ideas that he derived from already published documents and book, such as *A Thousand days* written by Arthur Schlesinger, and that he reinterpreted. Finally, Allison (1969), in order to develop his three Models, decided to rely mainly on ‘the full public record plus a large number of interviews with participants in the crisis’ (page 691). Therefore, similarly to Whyte and Levi, he used only primary sources; however, differently from them, he decided to obtain the information by talking directly with the people involved in the crisis.

Despite this, a last element that is interesting to notice is the decision-making process which was developed during the Cuban Missile Crisis and that can be successfully summarized with the graph made by Haas (2001), which can be seen in Figure 2. In this picture, the Player denominated with the number one is Khrushchev, while number two is Kennedy. Moreover, the final outcome that could be reached at the end of each pathway is written in capital letters and it could involve a more or less high degree of risk. One of the most interesting aspects of this graphic is that, according to Haas (2001), the first issue that Player number one, Khrushchev, had to face concerned whether to alter the existing status quo or not. This, as will be explained in the following paragraph, is significant for this thesis for the relationship existing between status quo and risk. Moreover, another interesting aspect concerns the idea, developed by Allison (1969), according to which, if the U2 flyover mission would have been taken, for example, a week later, the final decision could have been different and not so cautious.

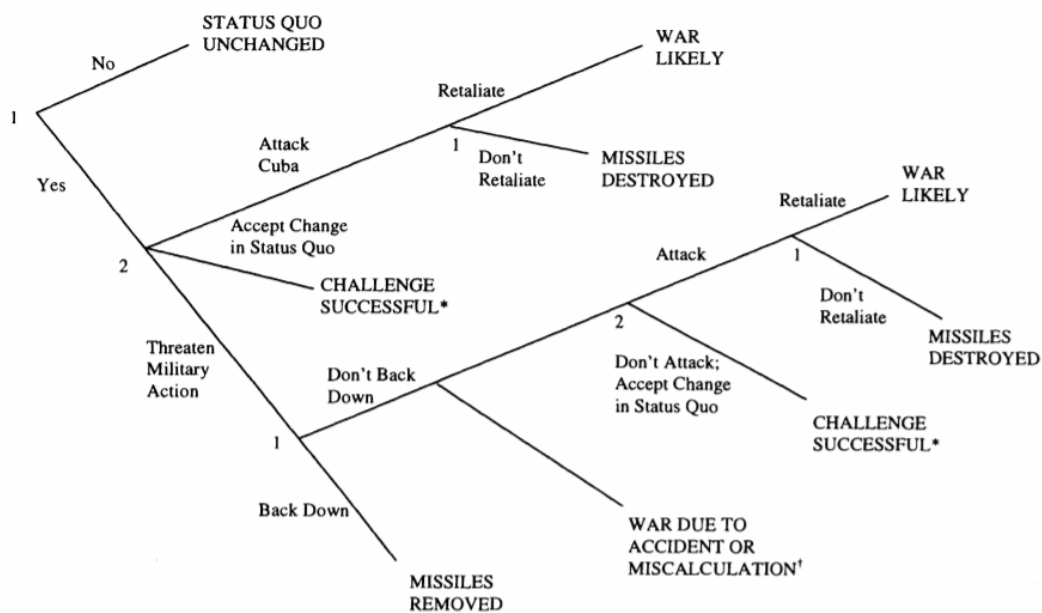


Figure 2 – The decision-making process tree of the Cuban Missile Crisis (Haas, 2001).



### *A. The Prospect Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Whyte and Levi's research*

The first paper that will be analysed is Whyte and Levi's (1994) one. The main characteristic of this research is that they tried to apply the Prospect theory, particularly the concept of reference point, to the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis in order to understand Kennedy's risk-taking behaviour. Indeed, as it was explained in Chapter 1, the outcome that can be derived from a particular decision is framed in terms of gain or loss in relation to a neutral reference point. The reference point, consequently, has a fundamental role in the risk-taking attitude of individuals. In fact, as Kahneman and Tversky (1981) stated, 'Shifts of reference can change the value difference between outcomes and thereby reverse the preference order between options' (page 456). However, the main problem of the majority of the researches that deal with the Prospect theory concerns the fact that they are all individual-based. Thus, a very little number of studies have tried to apply the Prospect theory and the idea of reference level to group decisions. For this reason, Whyte and Levi's main aim in this paper is to try to understand whether group decisions are biased by the presence of a reference point and, if yes, whether this reference level can influence the level of risk accepted by the group. However, what can be stated in this regard is that, at the end, by analysing the Cuban Missile Crisis using the reference point, they discovered that some of the assumptions proposed by the Prospect theory are not always true. In fact, even though Kennedy and the ExComm framed the situation in a negative way, at the end they took a cautious solution. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, the main aim will be, first, to analyse Whyte and Levi's study and, second, to understand why the crisis was solved peacefully despite the initial negative frame.

The methodology that Whyte and Levi decided to use consists in the analysis of the existing documentation regarding the crisis. In particular, in order to understand the ExComm and Kennedy's reference point, the primary source that was mostly used by these two scholars were the transcripts of the ExComm meetings and, particularly, of those meetings that took place on the day of the discovery of the missiles. In this sense, by analysing the different actors' statements, they were able to create some valuable propositions regarding Kennedy's attitude towards risk. Moreover, even though the crisis lasted for more or less thirteen days, the two researchers decided to focus especially on the first week of the dispute, from 16<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 1962. Indeed, that was the moment in which the most important decisions had to be taken and in which the risks were at their highest levels.

The first result that Whyte and Levi obtained through this research concerns the question of the reference level described earlier. Indeed, they found out that Kennedy's advisers relied significantly on one reference point in order to evaluate the possible solutions to be adopted to solve the crisis. In

this sense, they underlined that this reference point was created by President Kennedy a month before the beginning of the Cuban Missile Crisis when, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1962, he ‘publicly committed the United States to a reference level of zero nuclear missiles’ (Whyte and Levi, 1994). Indeed, in his speech he said that:

If at any time the Communist build-up in Cuba were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way . . . or if Cuba should ever . . . become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies . . . In the meantime we intend to do everything within our power to prevent such a threat from coming into existence (US Department of State, Bulletin, Volume XLVII, No. 1214(1 October 1962), pp. 481-482 in Whyte and Levi, 1994).

Consequently, what can be understood by reading this statement is that the placement of Soviet missiles in Cuba was the line beyond which the Kremlin could not go. Moreover, the ‘zero nuclear missiles in Cuba’ policy constitutes the neutral reference point that the ExComm used when the crisis actually started in October. What can be said is that this idea was sustained even by Gibson (2012): in fact, he stated that the first and most important decision taken by Kennedy was ‘not to accept the presence of the missiles’ (page 57). However, what is interesting about Gibson’s (2012) research is that, according to him, this reference point of zero nuclear missiles in Cuba was ‘not so much announced as assumed by everybody from the outset’ (page 57).

By taking into consideration this commitment to zero nuclear missiles, what can be argued is that, when the US first discovered the presence of the missiles in Cuba, it suffered a loss and, consequently, it became fundamental for them to come back to the status quo as soon as possible. This necessity of the US government, in turn, can be explained using the concept of loss aversion described for the first time by Kahneman and Tversky (1984): ‘a loss of \$X is more aversive than a gain of \$X is attractive’ (page 342). Said with other words, loss aversion consists in the tendency to ‘assume more risk to avoid a prospect framed as a loss than we will to obtain the identical prospect framed as a gain’ (Mercer, 2005, page 11). This definition, however, can be easily applied not only to the understanding of the decisions made by Kennedy during the first week of crisis but even Khrushchev’s decision to place the missiles in Cuba. Indeed, due to the problems linked with the missile gap, to the fragility of the Cuban position and, more in general, to the problems within the Communist world, ‘he was operating in the domain of losses’ (Haas, 2001, page 253). For all these reasons, he was more willing to take risks in order to try to solve some of these difficulties. However, even though the gains could have been high in case of success, the costs were extremely high too. Moreover, the risky decision taken by Khrushchev becomes even more relevant if it is taken into

consideration the fact that many of his advisers ‘believed that the chances of Kennedy responding to the missiles in an aggressive fashion were high’ (Haas, 2001, page 255-256).

Moreover, what Kahneman and Tversky decided to underline in their 1984 paper is that the idea of loss aversion becomes particularly powerful in the moment in which the reference level overlaps with the status quo. The reason is that, in the moment in which these two concepts manage to coincide and an individual experiences a loss, this loss becomes much more significant and painful for him/her than a gain. Therefore, ‘taking the status quo as the reference point, the individual weighs potential losses [...] as larger than potential gains. Because of loss aversion, the individual is biased in favour of the status quo’ (Samuelson and Zeckhauser, 1988, page 36). In other words, a person will be inclined to take risky decisions in order to restore the status quo even in the moment in which the costs become extremely high. This is clearly the situation in which Kennedy found himself in the autumn of 1962: in fact, at least at the beginning, he was more willing to attack Cuba than to try to find peaceful solutions.

In this context, what is relevant to understand is that all these theories and ideas are based on the single individual’s behaviour in situations of loss. However, what really matters in this thesis is the application of the concept of loss aversion to the international relations and, particularly, to groups. In this sense, what is important to underline is that ‘risk aversion might account for the relative stability of the international system, explain how one might solve collective action problems, and help identify the best way to influence an adversary’ (Mercer, 2005, page 2). From a more practical point of view, it is interesting the research made by Jervis (1992) since he found out that individuals and states, when they experience a loss, tend to react in the same way. Indeed, states facing some losses deriving from the negative altering of the status quo ‘will be willing to pay a higher price and run higher risks’, as it could be easily seen during the Cuban Missile Crisis or even during the attack on Pearl Harbor (Jervis, 1992, page 192). The main explanation for this dynamic lays in the idea that ‘when actors find their political position deteriorating, they are likely to view themselves in a domain of loss’ (Mercer, 2005, page 4). Furthermore, since the status quo is very often linked with the reference point during international crises, what can be assumed is that, from a negative difference in the status quo, it follows even a negative change of the reference point. This idea, consequently, can be represented using the Value Function Curve, as it can be seen in Figure 3. In fact, it is possible to see a shift from point A, which represents the status quo, to point B, which is the experienced loss.

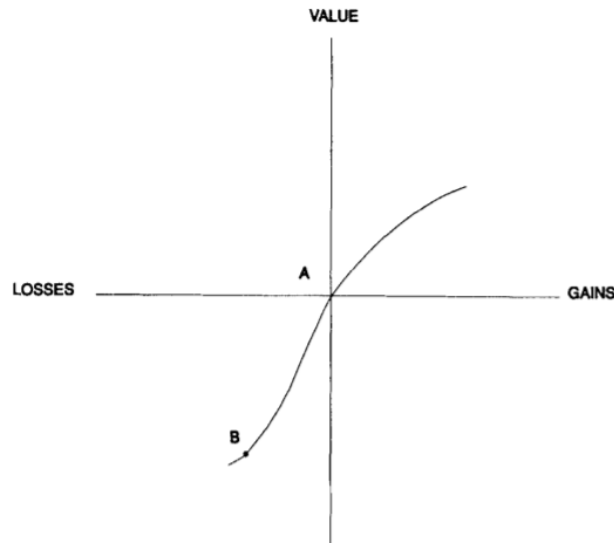


Figure 3 – Value Function Curve with a negative change of the reference level (Whyte and Levi, 1994).

By considering the level of risk involved in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, what can be assumed is that, since that the presence of the missiles in Cuba was perceived as a real threat for the United States, the decision to impose a naval blockade instead of attacking the island represents a cautious decision. Indeed, another important aspect about the Prospect theory that can be applied to the Cuban Missile Crisis, and particularly of Kennedy's behaviour, concerns the so-called 'probability-weighting function'. This is a psychological dynamic that occurs in the decision-makers' minds: 'when people's probability estimates approach certainty, they are very likely to switch from underweighting the effects of these estimates [...] to overweighting them' (Haas, 2001, page 260). In other words, when individuals find themselves in a domain of losses, they are more likely to overestimate the extent of this loss and to take, consequently, risky decisions. However, what Whyte and Levi (1994) underlined in their paper is that, in reality, the presence of the missiles in Cuba did not alter the balance of power and President Kennedy knew it. This thesis was supported even by Haas (2001), who stated that 'the [...] warnings made by U.S. officials against Soviet deployment of offensive missiles in Cuba were not made because such an event would change the balance of power' (pages 257-258). Indeed, the United States, according to Haas (2001), were not worried about the military power that the Soviets would have gained thanks to the missiles, but about the decreasing level of American credibility at the international level deriving from the USSR constant ignoring of US warnings. Moreover, if the Soviet point of view is taken into consideration, one possible assumption that can be made concerns the fact that the only reason that led the Soviet Union to decide to place the MRBMs in Cuba was the presence of the US missiles in Turkey. For this reason, what

Whyte and Levi (1994) argue is that the theories which are usually adopted in order to explain this confrontation are not enough since they do not manage to explain why the US government decide to arrive so close to a nuclear war. Consequently, they believe that the best way to explain why Kennedy decided to undertake such initial risk-taking behaviour is through the analysis of the effects of the reference point at the group level. In this sense, four key factors contributed to the creation of the reference level during the Cuban Missile Crisis: ‘the prevailing expectations of the decision makers, political pressures, behavioral commitment, and leader behavior’ (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 251). Of all these four aspects, the most relevant for the aim of this thesis is probably the last one, so the understanding of the Kennedy’s behaviour. In fact, in order to reach a decision, either risky or cautious, it is important to analyse the influence that each member can exert within the group.

Generally speaking, it is reasonable to expect that the leader will have more power than the rest of the group’s members, especially in dangerous situations. This dynamic could be clearly seen during the Cuban Missile Crisis: President Kennedy had a strong personality, he was respected by the members of the ExComm and, most importantly, he was personally committed to a reference level of no nuclear missiles in Cuba. This last aspect is particularly important to take into consideration since it led Kennedy to frame the situation as a loss. Indeed, after the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the US President was sure that Khrushchev considered him as an irresolute person. Thus, ‘ignoring Kennedy’s explicit deterrent warnings would only exacerbate Kennedy’s belief that Khrushchev thought he could be bullied’ (Haas, 2001, page 257). Of course, the US President could not accept a situation in which his credibility would have been affected. For this reason, what can be said is that, at least at the beginning, the decision seemed to be between a sure loss, so the acceptance of the presence of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, and a higher loss that entailed even the possibility to gain, so a direct attack at the missiles. Consequently, since Kennedy’s final aim was to come back to the status quo by completely removing the missiles, all the options proposed by the ExComm should have led, in a way or another, to the total dismantling of these nuclear weapons. For this reason, it is important to highlight the fact that, even though at the end Kennedy chose to adopt a different and more peaceful behaviour, the naval blockade has still to be seen as an instrument in order to show their willingness to take even more extreme actions. In fact, what is relevant in this sense is that all the alternatives proposed by the ExComm that did not help to reach this commitment of no nuclear missiles in Cuba were not even considered by the US President. This, in turn, is the main reason why the members of the Executive Committee were never really free to propose alternative solutions to the problem posed by the presence of the MRBMs, e.g., to find a diplomatic solution or just to leave the missiles there. For this reason, Whyte and Levi (1994) in their research concluded that

Given the constraints imposed on the options, and the fact that all roads leading to the early removal of the missiles were strewn with hazard, the success of the ExCom was in selecting one of the less extreme means available to achieve the inherently risky objective set by Kennedy (page 255).

In conclusion, Whyte and Levi's contribution to the analysis of the risk-taking behaviour of the US administration cannot be underestimated. In particular, their main result was the ability to show that the presence of a reference level did have repercussions in how the crisis evolved. Indeed, if there would not have been the 'zero nuclear missiles' commitment, the situations could have been different. For instance, the ExComm could have tried to find alternative and less risky solutions, such as the use of diplomacy, to solve the crisis. However, the presence of a political context of increasing tensions, which Kennedy himself contributed to create, had an important role in creating an environment in which it was impossible to accept a change in the reference point. Thus, 'the President and his advisers risked even greater losses to remove missiles that [they] [...] agreed did little to threaten national security' (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 256).

Furthermore, in the analysis of the level of risk undertaken during the Cuban Missile Crisis, what is worth to be considered is the role of the ExComm during the decision-making process. In fact, at the beginning of the crisis, they analysed all the possible solutions and they concluded that, first, doing nothing was not acceptable because this would have 'implied significant [...] losses for Kennedy in terms of domestic politics, his personal credibility, and America's standing in the world' (Haas, 2001, page 258). Second, a direct strike against the missiles in Cuba would have entailed enormous costs in terms of international security. Furthermore, both options, in ExComm members' view, would have led to a war between the two superpowers. For this reason, according to them, the only solution that would have maximised the US utility was to threaten Khrushchev. This, as it was stated earlier, was the solution adopted by Kennedy and, at the end, it led to a restoration of the status quo without the outbreak of a war. In this sense, what is interesting to note is that there are different points of view concerning the decision-making process adopted by this group. On one side, as it will be described in the following paragraph, there is Janis' (1972) perspective according to which the Executive Committee made very high-quality decisions because they were able to avoid the logics of groupthink to develop. However, on the other side, Whyte and Levi (1994) underlined that, although it is true that, on many occasions, the ExComm worked well, it is not possible to deny that this group had some weaknesses too. In this sense, the most relevant one concerns the fact that they accepted the reference point provided by Kennedy without discussions. For this reason, the ExComm was able

to frame the problem only in the same way as the US president did; consequently, a much more limited number of options were available.

Moreover, another important aspect of Whyte and Levi's research is that they contributed to enlarge the spectrum of the studies concerning the Prospect theory. Indeed, their decision to apply the Prospect theory in order to understand the group's attitude towards risk was completely new and their findings are a huge step forward in the study of this issue. In this sense, their main discovery is the following: 'Prospect theory implies [...] that when a group adopts a reference point that frames its decision as a choice between losses, most group members will prefer the risky option over the sure loss' (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 257). Moreover, by looking at this first explanation, what can be argued is that it is the choice shift phenomenon which finds support rather than the risky shift one sustained by Wallach, Kogan and Bem. In fact, even though the single individuals at the beginning favoured the riskiest option, so the attack against Cuba, after the discussion the group promoted a cautious shift.

Finally, the last interesting aspect of their study is that they tried to confirm even the group polarization hypothesis by applying the theory to this case-study. In order to understand Whyte and Levi's position in this regard, it is important to start from the definition of group polarization given in Chapter 1. Group polarization 'refers to an increase in the extremity of the average response of the subject population' which arise from the group discussion (Myers and Lamm, 1976, page 603). The main Whyte and Levi's thesis in this context is that, by considering the discussion within the ExComm when they first discovered the missiles, there should have been a risky shift since that the majority of them were favouring the possibility of an air strike against Cuba. In this context, what is interesting to notice about the threat of a US attack against Cuba is that 'threats increase the risks and costs to a challenger' (Mercer, 2005, page 16). However, at the end, there was not a risky shift but a cautious shift and this, consequently, is inconsistent with the group polarization theory. In particular, the fact that, within the ExComm, the members could talk freely 'helped to preclude group polarization and induce the cautious shift that is observable in the final decision' (Whyte and Levi, 1994, page 257).

### *B. The Groupthink Phenomenon and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Janis' research*

As it was explained in Chapter 1, Janis (1972) is the first scholar who talked about the phenomenon of Groupthink. Resuming, Groupthink can be considered a phenomenon which typically occurs in highly-cohesive groups that leads the members to overestimate the importance of having unanimity and this, consequently, lead them to take poor decisions. In particular, in order to sustain

his thesis, in the first part of his book *Victims of Groupthink* he analysed four historical crisis in which, according to him, the symptoms of Groupthink were evident. These are the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Korean war, the attack on Pearl Harbor and the Vietnam war. By looking at these case-studies, he was able to conclude that, in general, group tend to be risk-seeking actors in the international arena. However, what is interesting about Janis' research is that, in the second chapter of this book, he decided to compare the four events previously mentioned with two important crisis in which, according to him, there were little, if any, symptoms of Groupthink: the making of the Marshall Plan and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Regarding these two events, he was able to conclude that, since Groupthink was not present, the decision-making process and the final decisions that were adopted were better.

In particular, when dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis, Janis (1972) decided to focus his attention on the decisional process developed by the ExComm. Generally speaking, according to him, there are six characteristics that are important to take into account in order to consider a group's decision-making process as a good one:

1. The fact that the group has taken into consideration a wide range of possible alternatives;
2. The decision-makers have evaluated all the possible risks, costs and gains;
3. The group have repeatedly searched for information which can be relevant in order to analyse the possible choices;
4. The group's members have taken into consideration all the information and the different experts' points of view, even when they are against the initial position of the group itself;
5. The decision-makers have re-analysed all the possible consequences of all the possible alternatives;
6. Finally, they have 'made detailed provisions for executing the chosen course of action' (Janis, 1972, page 142).

On the basis of these six criteria, what Janis wanted to underline in his book is that the decision-taking process promoted by the ExComm was, in general, successful. In fact, it is important to remind that President Kennedy did not allow the Executive Committee to take into consideration all the possible alternatives during this crisis. Moreover, as it was underlined by Whyte and Levi (1994), the ExComm members are not innocent since that they simply accepted the reference level established by the US President without any discussion. However, despite these two weaknesses, according to Janis the ExComm worked very well. At the same time, another thing that is important to notice regarding these six norms is that they refer only to the 'quality of the decision-making procedures,



regardless of whether the outcome [...] was successful' (Janis, 1972, page 143). This is because, according to him, if the group has followed all these six steps there is a higher probability for the final decision to be a good decision. However, this is not always the rule. In fact, Janis (1972) argued that if the Soviets had reacted in a violent way to the naval blockade and if, consequently, a war have started, the decision-making process of the ExComm had still to be considered as good. However, although these six criteria are based on a theory that can be seen as right, what some scholars say is that they are 'meaningless because they are rarely applicable to real policy decisions' (Herek et al, 1987, page 205).

In general, what can be said is that the main problem linked with the idea that the ExComm performed well during the Cuban Missile Crisis is that not all the scholars agree. One possible example can be seen in the research made by Welch (1989). Indeed, in this paper he says that, of the six criteria described earlier that has to be followed by groups in order to reach sounded decisions, during the Cuban Missile Crisis five of them were missing. In other words, he was against Janis' statement concerning the good quality of the decision-making process developed by the ExComm. This idea, in turn, was sustained even by Gibson (2012) who, in his book, stated that 'the ExComm's actual decision-making process involved a succession of yes-no choices on binary options' (page 8). According to him, in fact, the ExComm members were not able to compare and discuss frankly all the possible alternatives. For this reason, Welch (1989) concluded that, at least in this case, the quality of the decision-making process could not be linked with the quality of the outcome. Indeed, it is important to consider that the process which led to the final decision was influenced by many different factors, e.g., the context and the time constraints. For this reason, 'Managing the crisis required less of a sense of strategy than a capacity to muddle through, and the ExComm's decision-making process reflected that requirement' (Welch, 1989, page 441). In this sense, according to this scholar, the ExComm simply responded to the challenges posed by the context and it adapted to the circumstances.

Moreover, according to Janis (1972), another fundamental element that should be considered in order to explain why the ExComm became such a successful decision-maker concerns the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Indeed, this event nowadays is considered as one of the worst fiascos of the US history which had great repercussions on the government and, particularly, on Kennedy. In this sense, what can be said is that, in such a context, the possibility of relying on a highly-cohesive group was fundamental in order to maintain the morale of the US administration high after this 1961 failure. However, 'The problem facing the leader of a cohesive group is how to obtain the morale gains of high cohesiveness without the losses caused by Groupthink' (Janis, 1972, page

147). What is interesting about Janis' research is the fact that, from his point of view, Kennedy, even though nobody ever talked about Groupthink during the 1960s, was aware of this problem. Indeed, one of the first things that he did right after the failed attempt to invade the Bay of Pigs was to create a commission that had to examine this event and to understand what went wrong. Then, starting from the work made by this commission, Kennedy introduced four new elements that were able to increase the quality of the decisions taken by the US government during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The first characteristic, according to Janis (1972), was the establishment of a new role for the decision-makers. Indeed, they had not only to represent their departments but they should turn into critical thinkers who had to analyse the problem as a whole rather than considering only some aspects of it. Second, there was the suspension of all the protocols and rules of conduct during the group discussion. Said with other words, each member had the possibility to explain his point of view in a very frank way. Moreover, they could speak even without the direct Kennedy's permission, they did not have to follow a formal agenda and 'explicit shows of deference were infrequent, and mostly directed to the president' (Gibson, 2012, page 7). Third, in order to improve the critical thinking of the group's members, Kennedy decided to divide it in two subgroups that met and worked in an independent way. Then, these two small groups could meet and they could discuss together. Fourth and final aspect was the possibility to have ExComm meetings without President Kennedy. This tactic was used and proved to be particularly successful during the first phases of the Cuban Missile Crisis when all the possible alternatives were taken into consideration. In fact, after the discovery of the missiles, the ExComm members met without Kennedy and, even though at the beginning they all wanted a direct attack against Cuba, after the first discussion they chose differently. On the other hand, 'If the President had presented his initial position forcefully, the group members might have conceptualized their task as deciding which type of air assault to recommend' (Janis, 1972, page 149). In this way, they would not have considered less violent and dangerous possibilities. In conclusion, the introduction of these four elements is the main reason why, according to Janis (1972), the ExComm, which was a very cohesive group, managed not to fall into the logics of Groupthink.

Moreover, what is important to underline is that Kennedy wanted to avoid some of the mistakes that he made during the Bay of Pigs invasion. Among them there was, for instance, 'an uncritical reliance on experts [...], national security meetings in which conformity to the president's chosen course of action became normative, and Kennedy's [...] susceptibility to having his judgement clouded by domestic political calculations' (Gibson, 2012, page 72). However, many scholars did not agree on this reasoning. One example is, again, Welch (1989): in his paper, he tried to show that, within the ExComm, some symptoms of Groupthink were present since that, according to him, five

out of six of the criteria described by Janis were missing. In other words, although the ExComm decisions were influenced by the presence of this phenomenon, the final decision was still good. For this reason, what Welch (1989) assumed is that there is not a direct link between Groupthink and the quality of the final outcomes. A second possible example of this tendency is represented by Gibson (2012) who believed that some elements of Groupthink were at stake throughout all the Cuban Missile Crisis. In particular, he contested Janis' thesis concerning the innovations introduced by Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs invasion. Indeed, Gibson (2012) in his book *Talk at the Brink: Deliberation and Decision during the Cuban Missile Crisis*, he stated that, right after the decision to impose the naval blockade, there was the 'suppression of [...] this narrative branch through [...] conventional mechanisms, including self-censorship, interruption, [...], ambiguation, and simple omission (page 164). For this reason, he ironically says that, instead of Groupthink, there was the phenomenon of grouptalk, defined as the tendency of all the ExComm members to 'converging on the same story while preventing its discontent from raising an effective objection' (Gibson, 2012, page 164). This is important because Groupthink, as Whyte and Levi (1994) stated, develops when there is the 'development of shared illusions and related norms' (page 256). In this sense, the ambition to reach a unanimous decision and be part of a group is much stronger for groups' members than their intention to propose alternative solutions.

In general, many scholars believe that 'those crisis decisions that are arrived at by a high-quality process [...] should also have the most favourable outcomes' that, consequently, should lead to a reduction of risks (Herek et al, 1987, page 206). However, concerning the risks taken by the ExComm during this crisis, what Janis (1972) underlines in his book regard the fact that 'the participants openly acknowledged that whatever course of action they were contemplating would be highly dangerous' (page 155). In particular, even in the moment in which they managed to reach a consensus regarding the naval blockade, Janis (1972) argued that they never had the sense of security that usually arises when a group is affected by Groupthink. Indeed, the decision to impose a naval blockade was still risky and disadvantageous for the United States since that the Soviets could still complete the missile sites in Cuba. Moreover, if the blockade would have lasted for a long period, this would have given the Soviets the time to react by making threats and directing the world opinion against the US. For this reason, they started to prepare even backup plans that involved a much higher degree of violence which, in turn, increased the general level of risk. Despite this increasing level of risk, all the ExComm members agreed that it was better to avoid 'any sudden or shocking act of aggression that might push the Soviet Union into making an impulsive decision to retaliate' (Janis, 1972, page 160). In this sense, what appears evident in Janis' analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis is that nobody in the

US wanted a direct confrontation with the USSR and that, on the contrary, they wanted to be cautious. In fact, what is interesting to underline is that ‘It was the discussion of this group that shaped Kennedy’s understanding of the options and the risks associated with each’ and that, at the end, led the US President to promote a cautious shift (Gibson, 2012, page 5). In this context, an episode that happened during this crisis is particularly remarkable since it clearly highlights the ExComm desire not to fight. The day after the blockade became effective, the ExComm was informed that some Soviet vessels were moving towards the line created by the United States ships in order to block the USSR armaments to arrive in Cuba. In that moment the tension was very high among the ExComm members that, in turn, started to discuss about a possible solution. However, at a certain point, they knew that the Soviets ships had stopped. This was perceived by Kennedy and the ExComm as a way to avoid a military confrontation; for this reason, the US President decided to ‘move the interception line three hundred miles closer to Cuba’ (Janis, 1972, page 161). In this way, Khrushchev would have had more time to evaluate the situation and take a decision. Finally, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, it became clear that the Soviets ‘wanted a peaceful settlement if they could find a nonhumiliating way out’: in fact, as it was described earlier, with a first letter, the Soviets proposed to Kennedy a possible deal aiming at solving this crisis (Janis, 1972, page 161). According to this first possible agreement the USSR would have removed the missiles from Cuba in exchange for the US commitment not to invade the island. After this first letter, the US administration was hoping for a rapid and peaceful conclusion of this crisis; however, the day after, another letter from the Soviet Union arrived. In this second letter, they asked more to the United States: they would have agreed to dismantle the missiles in Cuba in exchange for the dismantling of the US missiles in Turkey. The reaction of the ExComm was very harsh and there was, again, a deepening of the crisis. However, what is interesting is that, at the end, a cautious shift occurred within the United States. Indeed, Robert Kennedy, President Kennedy’s brother, proposed that, instead of risking a Third World War, they could have simply ignored the second letter and considered and answered only to the first one. In this sense, what is interesting to notice is that the ExComm members did not answer with a letter filled with threats of a military confrontation. On the contrary, ‘they adopted a mixed strategy of “coercive diplomacy”’ (Janis, 1972, page 164).

In conclusion, Janis’ (1972) most important contribution in his analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis concerns the importance that he gave to the role of the ExComm during this event. In particular, their ability to avoid falling into the logics of Groupthink has a primary importance because, in this way, they manage to successfully evaluate the pros and the cons of all the alternatives and, consequently, to produce a cautious shift. Indeed, Janis (1972) stated that, ‘if groupthink tendencies had become dominant, the group would have chosen a much more militaristic course of action’ (page

165). Furthermore, a particularly relevant role was played by the six criteria described at the beginning of the paragraph since they can help to understand the quality of the decision-making process. This, in turn, is fundamental because it is the starting point for the evaluation of the level of risk involved in groups' decisions at the international level with the adoption of the Groupthink theory. For example, Janis' positive evaluation of the ExComm decision-making process is, according to him, the primary reason in order to explain why the cautious shift occurred. However, what can be said is that today there is a debate among scholars concerning the application of these criteria to the Cuban Missile Crisis. On one hand, Janis' thesis regarding the good quality of the ExComm decision-making process was sustained in the experiment made by Herek et al (1987). During their study, they decided to analyse nineteen important crisis that occurred after the Second World War in order to understand how many symptoms of groupthink were present. What is important to underline is that, in order to reach this goal, they decided to use only bibliographic sources and to try to understand which of the six criteria described by Janis was present. At the end, they managed to prove that, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, only one symptom was present: the failure to reanalyse alternatives that were previously rejected. On the other hand, this study was harshly criticized by Welch (1989): in fact, he stated that, first, the ExComm could not evaluate all the possible alternatives. Second, it is important to remember that decision-makers never have perfect information. For this reason, according to Welch (1989), the ExComm could not analyse all the possible costs, risks and gains. Finally, even though it is fundamental to try to foresee which will be the consequences of a particular action, there are limits in the decision-makers' ability to do so. This is particularly true if it is considered the fact that hundreds of outcomes were possible after the establishment of the naval blockade. For this reason, the ExComm would have wasted a lot of time if it had tried to estimate all these results.

Resuming, Janis' study regarding Groupthink can be considered a valuable research since he took into consideration some aspects about the ExComm that were never analysed by other scholars. Moreover, through his theory about Groupthink, he was able to explain why, at the end, the crisis was solved without a direct conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States and so why the cautious shift occurred. However, many critics and doubts were raised by scholars during the years concerning this topic and, for this reason, it seems that Janis' theory has much more weaknesses and limits than Whyte and Levi's one.

### *C. The Three Models Theory and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Allison's research*

The third and last research which talks about the Cuban Missile Crisis that it is fundamental to analyse is Allison's (1969) one. Indeed, his research is probably one of the most elaborated and accredited studies regarding the possible theories that can be used to explain important historical events. Moreover, his ideas are completely different from Whyte and Levi's and Janis' ones: in fact, he did not apply neither the Prospect theory nor the Groupthink theory; he created his own theory that, throughout this thesis, was called Three Model Theory. However, what is important to specify is that he chose, as Whyte and Levi (1994) did, to analyse only the first part of this crisis and, in particular, the US decision to impose the blockade.

In order to understand what Allison argued regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis, it is important, first of all, to summarize the general assumptions of the Three Models theory. What is interesting about this theory is that, in order to develop it, Allison's starting points were three different considerations:

1. When decision-makers have to evaluate problems concerning foreign and/or military policies, they usually think about them in terms of conceptual models which, in turn, have a serious impact in their reasoning;
2. In order to explain and foresee national governments' behaviours at the international level, decision-makers usually tend to adopt the Model I, the Rational Policy Model;
3. However, according to Allison (1969), other two models (Model II and Model III) exist and these two alternative models 'provide a base for improved explanation and prediction' (page 63).

In other words, according to Allison (1969), the most important historical events can be analysed using three different and alternative frameworks, which he calls Models: (i) the Rational Policy Model, (ii) the Organizational Process Model, and (iii) the Bureaucratic Politics Model. Each of them have different characteristics and different actors involved. For this reason, the decision-making process that the group will develop in situations of crisis will be different and based on which of the three Models is considered. This, in turn, can have repercussions even on the level of risk that groups will be willing to accept. However, generally speaking, what Burnstein (2000) said is that Model I, within Allison's paper, was considered as the worst and the most incomplete model. Consequently, this is the reason why Model II and Model III were created: indeed, they are considered superior and, in some cases, even complementary.

If the Rational Policy Model (Model I) is considered, what can be said is that the main characteristics are, in general, three: the first one is that the most relevant players in the international

field are the national governments, which are rational actors. Second, each government has a specific number of goals to be reached. Third, the government will analyse, in a rational way, which are the best moves in order to satisfy all its desires and, at the same time, to increase its gains. As Krasner (1972) stated, usually the decision-making process in Model I has three steps: (i) the different options in order to solve a situation are explained, (ii) the possible gains and losses of each proposal are evaluated, and (iii) the decision-makers decide the option that most increases the expected utility. In this sense, what can be assumed is that the level of risk that the group decides to undertake is based on rational calculations regarding the possible gains and losses. Consequently, they will rationally choose the level of risk that helps more to increase the possible gains while, at the same time, decreasing the losses. If these elements are applied to the Cuban Missile Crisis, what Allison (1969) argued is that the US decision to impose a blockade over Cuba after the discovery of the missiles can be seen only as a rational value-maximising choice. This assumption can be explained by considering that the nuclear power of the United States was higher than the Soviet one: for this reason, the US only needed to make credible threats in order to appear willing to take even violent measures. In this sense, the choice that rationally would have given the US more advantages was the imposition of the blockade. In fact, first, it was neither a violent nor a peaceful solution, it was somewhere in the middle. Second, it left Khrushchev the decision whether to attack or not. Third, Kennedy could still make threats to the Soviet Union. In conclusion, what can be said is that:

All that was required was for the United States to bring to bear its strategic and local superiority in such a way that American determination to see the missiles removed would be demonstrated, while at the same time allowing Moscow time and room to retreat without humiliation. The naval blockade [...] did just that (Allison, 1969, page 696).

However, by reading Allison's research what can be concluded is that 'Model I was simplistic and greatly inadequate' to explain big historical events and that, consequently, Model II and Model III are more important (Bernstein, 2000, page 140). In this sense, some weak points can be found regarding Model I as it was described by Allison. Indeed, according to Bendor and Hammond (1992), in international relations a model which takes into consideration the rationality of the actors should have two components: 'a decision-theoretic one and a game-theoretic one' (page 305). The first analyses the characteristics of the decision-makers, the second the strategy that they adopt. However, Bendor and Hammond (1992) stated that, on one hand, the first aspect is too simple in Allison's analysis; on the other hand, concerning the second aspect, 'the model neglects strategic interactions' (page 305). Furthermore, a second weak point is that Allison, in his research, does not take into consideration how the different actors react in situations of uncertainty and, in particular, he does not

analyse the decision-makers' attitude towards risk. Finally, as Bernstein (2000) stated, it seems that Allison is not so sure 'about what Model I includes in practice, and how to apply [his] theory' (page 152).

Concerning the Organizational Process Model (Model II), the most relevant features are, first, the fact that the main actors are no longer the national governments but a conglomerate of organizations which, in turn, are controlled by government leaders. Second, these organizations operate following previously-determined routines and conventional rules which, in turn, constrain the behaviour of the individuals within the organization itself (Vanhoonacker and Wangen, 2015). Third, the final decisions taken by a nation will be the result of a certain number of discussions that occurred at the governmental level. Moreover, there are three basic characteristics of organizations that are important to underline since they were present during the Cuban Missile Crisis: first, the fact that, when the situations cannot be solved using standard patterns of behaviour, they search for alternative solutions. Second, the idea that organizations are not static but they can learn and grow while searching for these alternative solutions. Third, the concept according to which 'government action [is] limited by the routines or plans that agencies use' (McKeown, 2001, page 1165). This last aspect is fundamental since that, during international crises, it is very rare that a government is able to successfully manage the problem without any form of previous organization. Consequently, without preparation, there is a very high probability of taking risky decision which, in turn, can lead to huge failures. Furthermore, another aspect that is important to consider is Allison's thesis according to which, during international crises, when it is impossible to find a solution with peaceful negotiations, organizations should try to establish a series of standard scenarios in order to respond adequately. Therefore, what can be concluded by considering all these aspects is that, in this second model, the ExComm plays a primary role since it constituted the organization that, after long series of discussions, took all the decisions within the United States. In this sense, a clear example is the decision to impose the blockade since it was the result of 'a critical week of deliberation' (Allison, 1969, page 704). Indeed, what Allison argues is that this decision was based on two considerations made by the ExComm members: the first was that the US, from a moral point of view, could not perpetuate an attack that was compared to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Second, there was the belief that an air strike against Cuba would not have solved the problem since there was no certainty of success. Moreover, what is interesting to underline is the fact that 'each organization perceives problems, processes information, and performs a range of actions in quasi-independence' (Allison, 1969, page 700). This, in turn, implies that the final decisions are based on the members' subjective sets of beliefs and ideas rather than on rationality and, consequently, the level of risk accepted by the



organization cannot be predetermined. Furthermore, in this context the role of the leader becomes fundamental in shaping the organization's attitude towards risk. This could be seen at the beginning the Cuban Missile Crisis when, first, the ExComm members and Kennedy were in favour of a risky action but, then, they changed their minds in favour of a more cautious solution.

However, a weakness that has been made to this second model concerns the fact that the creation of plans works only in the short period of time while, in the long run, 'routines can be developed or modified so that organizational capabilities evolve' (McKeown, 2001, page 1166). In fact, one factor that is important to consider is that a successful organization should have the ability to foresee the possible international events and, consequently, it should create new and more adequate routines. This idea can be applied even to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Indeed, even though it seems a short crisis, in reality evidences of the Soviet willingness to place the missiles in Cuba existed well before October. For this reason, a relevant question that McKeown (2001) posed to himself is why the members of the US administration did not start to create plans before the discovery of the missiles? His answer is simple: it was because 'routines and plans did not closely constrain the U.S. response to the discovery of missiles in Cuba' (McKeown, 2001, page 1164). Moreover, a second critic that can be made to Model II concerns the fact that routines can bring to undesired, and in some cases even riskier, results. According to Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015) a clear example of this tendency can be seen in the Soviet decision not to cover the missiles in Cuba that led the US to recognize them easily. In addition, another weakness was presented by Bendor and Hammond (1992): in their paper, in fact, they analysed Allison's idea according to which individuals are not completely rational and that, in order to take decisions, they use simple rules called 'standard operating procedures'. Therefore, in theory, 'simple rules generate simple, predictable behaviour' (Bendor and Hammond, 1992, page 309). However, this idea is in contrast with the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis since that these simple rules, in theory, should have conduct to the attack of Cuba and not to the establishment of the naval blockade. Finally, a fourth weakness was described by Bernstein (2000). Indeed, he said that:

Model II's emphasis on organizational culture, and on the way it can ill-serve officials at higher levels like the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), may actually impair the analyst's understanding of organizations, their culture, and their behavior in some parts of the missile crisis (Bernstein, 2000, page 144).

Finally, another aspect of Model II which is interesting to take into consideration concerns the relationship that exists between aspirations and achievements within organizations. Indeed, 'when achievements are perceived to be falling short of aspirations, then a search for new alternatives is

initiated' (McKeown, 2001, page 1169). This search for alternatives, in turn, stops when the members manage to find a solution which is classified as 'good enough' to reach aspirations. In this sense, what is relevant according to McKeown (2001) is that the blockade established in 1962 by the US was always considered by the ExComm members as a problematic solution. However, this negative perception was never enough to push them to search alternative and better options. For this reason, what can be assumed is that being dissatisfied by the chosen alternative sometimes does not constitute a stimulus for the development of new options. In this sense, closely linked with this theory there is the idea of bounded rationality of the individuals. In fact, according to Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015), since people do not have perfect information about all the possible alternatives, it follows that policy-makers usually do not try to maximise their utility but they search for the alternative that better satisfies their needs and desires. The two ideas described so far, in turn, are strictly linked with the risk-tendency of groups: in fact, there can be cases in which the decision-makers, in order to reach a particular aspiration or to satisfy their desires, are willing to take even greater risks. In this case, both the group polarization and the choice shift theories can be successfully applied since that the members of the different organizations can take either more cautious or riskier decisions depending on the discussion developed within the organization.

Finally, if the Bureaucratic Politics Model (Model III) is considered, the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis must be analysed from a different perspective. Indeed, in this third model, the main actors are neither the nations nor the organizations, they are the persons that bargain within the government. Said with other words, differently from Model I and Model II, in Model III the main actors are the individuals which, in turn, form part of particular groups that place themselves within the government. Consequently, each individual within these groups possesses some bargaining power and he/she can fight for the desires of the group. In this sense, there is not one monolithic actor but rather a constellation of different actors that, in turn, share the power. For this reason, what Bernstein (2000) stated is that 'policy resulted from "pulling and hauling", from negotiating and sparring, among the main actors' (page 140). In this regard, what is important to underline is the fact that, according to Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015), the most important actors within this third model are not only the political leaders but also other powerful individuals. For this reason, the final governmental decisions are not the result of discussions or of rational choices, but of bargaining games: therefore, 'what the nation does is sometimes the result of the triumph of one group over others' (Allison, 1969, page 707). Consequently, even in this case, since that the decisions that are taken by a nation at the international level are the result of bargaining games, these decisions can be both in a cautious or in a risky direction. Indeed, there are not clear proof of a nation's tendency to

take only either risky or cautious decisions: it depends on the desire of each group that is bargaining at the national level and on which group, at the end, manages to prevail over the others. In this sense, a more complete explanation of Model III was provided by Krasner (1972). In fact, he says that 'Important decisions result from numerous smaller actions taken by individuals at different levels in the bureaucracy who have partially incompatible national, bureaucratic, political, and personal objectives' (Krasner, 1972, page 159).

In this sense, if the facts of the Cuban Missile Crisis are analysed according to this third perspective, what Allison says is that there were bargaining games regarding 'both the date of the discovery of the Soviet missiles and the impact of this discovery on the Administration' (Allison, 1969, page 712). Concerning the first aspect, the date of the discovery, what can be said is that a fundamental role was played by the Congressional elections. In this sense, Cuba was a central element of Kennedy's campaign and, at the same time, his Achilles' heel. For this reason, many statements were made by US officials regarding the fact that the situation in Cuba should be maintained under strict control. However, at the same time, the US President continued denying any Soviet involvement in the island. Due to all these elements, in turn, the date of the discovery has been postponed to the middle of October rather than the end of September. In this sense, one important action promoted by Kennedy that contributed to hide the Soviet missiles in Cuba was the decision to 'modify the fly pattern of the U-2s in order to reduce the probability that a U-2 would be lost' (Allison, 1969, page 713). Another fundamental aspect concerns the semantic difference between 'defensive' and 'offensive' weapons. Indeed, in his 13 September speech, Kennedy announced that the United States would have been obliged to react harshly in the case in which the Soviet Union would have tried to introduce offensive weapons in Cuba. However, at that time, 'Administration officials were denying that there was any evidence whatever of offensive missiles in Cuba' (Allison, 1969, page 713). Concerning the second aspect, the impact of the discovery, what Allison (1969) says is that President Kennedy was not only surprised but even angry for the placement of the missiles. Indeed, due to the fact that Kennedy was so sure that the USSR would never place missiles in Cuba, this event was particularly powerful in increasing the disagreement towards the US President at the domestic level. Consequently, the main reason why, according to Allison (1969), Kennedy wanted the total removal of the missiles was to save his personal reputation within the US. This, in turn, has serious consequences in the actions that the US President wanted to adopt to reach his goal of removing the missiles. Indeed, particularly at the beginning, he was willing to undertake a high level of risk even though the ExComm advised him about the low chances of success.

Regarding this third model, what McKeown (2001) argues is that it is closely linked with the second one. Indeed, plans and routines can have repercussions on bargaining: in fact, ‘bargaining is often over what plan or routine will be adopted’ (McKeown, 2001, page 1187). Moreover, routines and plans are fundamental in order to understand the status quo point over which it is possible to bargain. However, according to Bernstein (2000), Model III presents three main weak points. The first is that it ignores the role of some actors like the Congress or the public opinion and that is very difficult to put into practice. A second possible weak point concerns the fact that this model is ‘uncertain about how to treat the hierarchy among the pullers and haulers’ (Bernstein, 2000, page 141). In other words, when this model is used, it is not clear who can choose the bargainers. Finally, a third and last critic for the Bureaucratic Politics Model regards the unclear role of the President. Indeed, there are, on one side, some moments in which he is considered only as a normal player and, on the other side, moments in which he is at a higher level in the game. This last critic was sustained even by Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015). In particular, they underline the fact that the President has the faculty to choose his advisers. Therefore, he elects people that share his own values and beliefs and that will be loyal to him. For this reason, what Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015) concluded is that the President has much more power than what Allison assumed in his paper. Moreover, what Vanhoonacker and Wangen (2015) argue concerning Model III is that the description provided by Allison about it is very vague and it is difficult to understand which aspects are important and which are not. Finally, in Krasner’s (1972) view, this third model is ‘misleading, dangerous, and compelling’ (page 160). Indeed, it is misleading because the presidential role is not taken into consideration, dangerous because ‘it undermines the assumptions of democratic politics by relieving high officials of responsibility’ (Krasner, 1972, page 160). Third, it is compelling because it can be used as an excuse by the leader in order to explain their failures. Moreover, it is interesting what Krasner argues about Kennedy’s decision to impose the blockade rather than to adopt a more peaceful solution. In this sense, as it was explained earlier, Allison argued that Kennedy was in a bad position at the domestic and international level. In fact, he had to consider the forthcoming elections, the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the fear that American threats were not considered as valuable by the Soviets and, finally, the fear of losing his reputation. For these reasons, what can be said is that ‘Bureaucratic analysis [...] implies that any man in the same position would have had no choice’ (Krasner, 1972, page 171). Consequently, this decision not to adopt a diplomatic solution was imposed by the office. However, ‘To adopt [...] the view that the office determined Kennedy’s action is both to underrate his power and to relieve him of responsibility’ (Krasner, 1972, page 171). Finally, Krasner’s paper is interesting because he criticized even what Allison said about the delay of the discovery. Indeed, according to him, this delay can be better explained by considering Kennedy’s beliefs and ideas rather

than bureaucratic politics dynamics. In conclusion, as Bendor and Hammond (1992) stated, ‘Whereas Allison’s formulation of the unitary rational actor is too “thin”, Model III is simply too “thick”’ (page 318). Indeed, according to them, in Model III as it was originally explained by Allison there are too many variables that should have been considered. This can be explained by saying that, since the actors which bargain are the individuals, it follows that the final decisions depend even on the players of this game. In fact, it is fundamental to consider that everyone has its own personality, style, beliefs and ideas which, in turn, can influence the final outcome promoted by the government.

### *3.1.3 - Conclusions*

In conclusion, what can be said after this first analysis of the major events and theories regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis is that this case-study is particularly significant for the aim of this thesis and especially for the understanding of how groups react to the presence of an element of risk during international crises. Indeed, the first important result that was obtained through the research over this case-study is that it really helps to understand that groups are not always more risk-takers compared to individuals. In fact, what can be argued is that there are some elements, such as the context or the organization of the group itself, that are really able to promote a shift in a cautious direction. Consequently, a second result of this analysis can be seen in the refusal of the risky shift phenomenon as it was described by Wallach, Kogan and Bem in 1962 and 1963. In fact, if this theory would have been true, the members of the ExComm would have been willing to directly attack Cuba and, therefore, a nuclear war would have been expected to begin. Moreover, this outcome, in theory, would have been favoured by the members of the ExComm and explained by them using the Diffusion of Responsibility hypothesis. Indeed, according to Wallach, Kogan and Bem (1963), people are more willing to undertake high levels of risk in situations of uncertainty because, in case of loss, they can share the responsibility. This, in turn, is exactly what should have happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis if this theory would have been right. However, as it was explained earlier, this did not happen and the final result was completely different. Moreover, what can be said is that a third outcome, which is linked with the first and the second ones, can be derived from the analysis of the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In fact, although the choice shift and the group polarization phenomena proved to be more valuable theories, it is not always true that the final group’s decisions are more extreme but in the same direction that was initially preferred by the members of the group. Indeed, even though at the beginning the great majority of the ExComm members favoured the riskiest option, so the attack against Cuba, at the end the final result was the adoption of a cautious solution, so the naval blockade.

Finally, the last important result obtained thanks to the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis regards the comparison between the different studies that aimed at explaining the events of 1962. Indeed, the examination of all these theories proved to be particularly powerful in order to better understand this international crisis: indeed, Whyte and Levi, Janis and Allison all considered important but different elements. First of all, Whyte and Levi, by using the transcripts of the ExComm meetings, were able to apply some ideas of the Prospect theory to explain why, at the end, the decision to impose a naval blockade was taken. In particular, their use of the concept of reference point proved to be really useful in order to understand the ExComm members' behaviour during the first week of crisis. However, some discrepancies can be found concerning the idea of loss aversion and the consequent shift in the riskiest direction that, in theory, should have been followed.

Second, Janis' ideas regarding the six criteria for the evaluation of the quality of the decision-making process and the importance of the changes promoted by Kennedy within the ExComm provided a different perspective on this event. Indeed, these two are aspects that scholars such as Whyte and Levi or Allison did not consider but that, at the end, appeared to be correct since that they really played a role in the final cautious shift. Consequently, by looking at Janis' analysis regarding the Cuban Missile crisis, what can be stated is that having a cohesive group does not always imply that a bad and risky decision is about to come.

Finally, for what concerns Allison's paper, what can be said is that it was the most complex study to analyse since that three different points of view were taken to explain groups' behaviour during international crises. According to Model I, the best way to understand why the ExComm decided for the naval blockade regards rationality: in fact, this was the only option that entailed the highest gains with the lowest costs. On the other hand, if Model II is considered, the explanation for the ExComm final decision lays in routines and common patterns of behaviour. Finally, by looking at Model III, what can be argued is that the final result was due to a series of bargaining games within the different ExComm members. In other words, according to the Bureaucratic Politics Model, at the end there was the imposition of the naval blockade because the interests of one group within the ExComm prevailed over those of other groups.

In conclusion, what can be said is that the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis is fundamental for this thesis for two reasons: first, it is an extremely powerful example of international crisis in which, at the end, the government manage to avoid a disastrous war. Consequently, it really helps to understand that groups' behaviour in situations of uncertainty is not linear since that it does not follow rational reasonings but personal beliefs and thoughts. Moreover, this is a case-study that is really able

to show that, in order to understand the governments' tendency towards risk, it is not enough to say that groups are more risk-takers compared to individuals. Consequently, the second thing that can be learnt from this crisis about groups' behaviour in situations of risk concerns the importance of emotions in promoting shifts in a cautious or risky direction. In this case, in fact, what pushed the ExComm members towards the cautious solution was the fear for a nuclear war. However, what can be argued is that considering only the emotions is not enough since that other factors have to be examined. Among them particularly powerful are, as Janis stated, the group's organization and the role of the leader. For example, the fact that the ExComm members were able to talk freely really helped to reach a peaceful solution. Moreover, by looking Whyte and Levi's research, what can be derived is that another factor that is important to consider is how the problem is presented to the group. Indeed, by considering the ExComm, what can be stated is that, since Kennedy presented the problem as a sure loss, the range of possible alternatives was more limited. Finally, another aspect that was not considered in these studies but that can be extremely influential during the decision-making process is the context. In this case, for example, it is important to consider that, even though that was the period of the Cold War, the fear for a nuclear war was extremely high and this was an element that blocked the ExComm from doing something dangerous. Moreover, Kennedy could not attack Cuba even because, in this way, the international reputation of the US and of Kennedy himself would have been ruined.

### 3.2 – *The attack on Pearl Harbor*

The attack on Pearl Harbor perpetrated by Japan on December 7, 1941 has been considered for more or less 60 years, until the 9/11 terrorist attack, the greatest failure in the American history. According to Russett (1967), this crisis ‘represents one [...] of the most conspicuous and costly failures of deterrence in history’ (page 91). In particular, it was a moment of ‘dramatic failure of a remarkable well-informed government to call the next move in a cold-war crisis’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page vii). Indeed, what can be said is that, in 1941, a variety of signals concerning the forthcoming attacks existed but the US intelligence was unable to take the adequate actions to prevent them. In fact, many people, within the United States, firmly believed that Japan would have never been willing to undertake so much risk. Therefore, they were taken completely by surprise. In this sense, some scholars today think that the main reason why the US were not able to foresee this event was the lack of information regarding Japanese plans. However, many researchers, such as Dahl (2013) and Wohlstetter (1962), disagree over this statement. In fact, the United States had a lot of information regarding the attack but ‘the information was lost in a noisy international environment and blocked by parochial bureaucratic interests’ (Dahl, 2013, page 30).

Generally speaking, it was an attack that, in theory, would have permitted Japan to enter in the Second World War from an advantageous position. However, at the end, ‘the decision for war was risk laden and ultimately disastrous’ (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 792). On the other hand, it was a focal moment in the US history: indeed, the US isolationist policies ended and they started to recognize their role as international actors. In fact, in this way, the United States entered WWII fighting against Japan and this, in turn, led, in 1945, to the total defeat of the Japanese Empire with the two US atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Therefore, at the end, what can probably be argued is that it represented a disaster more for Japan than for the US. Indeed, for the United States, as it will be underlined in the following paragraphs, this was only an inconvenience. Consequently, this is the reason why some scholars, such as Levi and Whyte (1997) and Brown (1977), considered this attack as a ‘strategic imbecility’ or ‘military suicide’ from the Japanese part. Sagan (1988), in turn, described it as ‘the act of a mad dog’ (page 893). In other words, the great majority of scholars agree in saying that this attack was too risky since that the chances of winning were very limited for Japan. However, as Roskin (1974) stated, ‘By not stopping aggressors immediately, you encouraged them’ (page 568). In conclusion, what can be said about this event is that there are many different factors that have to be considered in order to explain what it seems to be a completely irrational and extremely risky decision.



### 3.2.1 – Historical Overview

First of all, in order to successfully explain why the Japanese took such a risky decision as to attack the Hawaii in 1941, it is fundamental to consider its culture. Indeed, the importance of the existence of a very high sense of nationalism cannot be underestimated. In fact, it is fundamental to consider that, by the end of the nineteenth century, the major Japanese desire was to become the most powerful country of the Eastern hemisphere. They believed that this was their destiny. This, in turn, led Japan to conquer, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Manchuria, Taiwan and Korea (Buhl, 1996). What is interesting is that, in Japan, this military expansion started to be explained with the term *bushido* which means ‘the way of the warrior’ (Sharf, 1993). However, a relevant aspect about these conquests is that the Japanese saw them not as a domination in the Western-style but as a way to help the poor people of these countries to modernize. Despite this, until the end of the 1920s, Japan always tried to maintain good relations with the Western countries in order to ensure their possibility of having oil and other rare and precious products. The problem was that, by the end of the 1930s and the beginning of 1940s, Japanese ambitions grew and the United States ‘become concerned with the power balance in Asia and tightened restrictions on industrial supplies to Japan’ (Buhl, 1996, page 46).

Second, spiritualism played an important role too. It was born following the principles of Confucianism and Buddhism but, then, Japan added some specific characteristics. The most important one regarded the Emperor, who started to be seen both as a spiritual and political authority. Indeed, it became a ‘symbol and core of the nation’s “cultural unity” and “cultural identity”’ (Takeda, 1988, page 3). This spiritualism, in turn, led to the creation of a strong feeling of ethnocentrism: people in Japan perceived themselves as superior and this gave birth to the belief that ‘Japan was rising quickly in the world hierarchy’ (Buhl, 1996, page 48). For this reason, Western people started to be seen as opportunistic and, consequently, there was a gradual refusal of all the things coming from the West. However, what is interesting is that, despite the victories in some important wars, e.g., the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895), the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905) and the Sino-Japanese war (1937), Japan started to realize that it did not have the power to compete with the Western countries in case of war. This, consequently, brought the Japanese leaders to think that it was necessary to modernize and to acquire new technologies. Indeed, during and after the First World War, Japan saw an incredible development and it almost reached the level of the Western countries. Despite this, what can be said is that ‘the Japanese continued to harbor a great deal of resentment for the exclusion from the bargaining table of the Great Powers’ after WWI (Buhl, 1996, page 55). However, at the same time, Japan was still highly dependent of the West for what concerns the import of modern technologies and strategic materials.

From a historical point of view, what can be said is that the main reason that led Japan to attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 was the Japanese decision to create the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. This, in fact, would have given to the Japan 'economic self-sufficiency, dominance over China and Southeast Asia, and equal status with the Western powers' (Levi and Whyte, 1997). Moreover, what is interesting is that they found the legitimacy for these territorial ambitions in the Monroe Doctrine promoted by the US which was based on the famous motto 'America for Americans'. In this sense, they developed what can be considered a sort of 'Asian Monroe Doctrine' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 799). In order to reach this goal, they created a double image of the Western countries: the first as 'ravenous wolves', so as countries whose main aim was to conquer other nations and use their territory to dominate the entire world (Buhl, 1996). The second as 'paper tiger': this was the belief that, even with a weak demonstration of force against them, the Western countries could collapse (Buhl, 1996). This, in turn, reinforced Japanese desire to try to expand its influence in different Asian countries which, at that time, were either English or Dutch colonies, in particular Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. In fact, there was the clear belief within the Japanese administration that it was necessary to 'take great risks, or to plunge with faith into the sea of unknown' (Russett, 1967, page 89). Consequently, on one hand, the United States, which had strategic interests in those areas, started to impose more and more restrictions in the supply of oil to Japan. On the other hand, particularly after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria of 1931, the US, the UK and the Netherlands decided to freeze all their assets and to stop trade (Buhl, 1996). In this sense, it was decided that this measure would have been eliminated only after a restoration of the status quo in China. The most immediate consequence of these actions was that Japan, by the end of 1941, found itself with 'shortages in bauxite, rice, tin, nickel, rubber, scrap iron, and most importantly, oil' (Brown, 1977, page 4).

What can be said is that, during the summer of 1941, both parties tried to solve this problem with negotiations but, at the end, all the attempts were failures. In particular, the main idea in Japan was that: 'either negotiations must result in lifting the United States embargo [...], or Japan would have to fight the Americans' (Russett, 1967, page 90). Therefore, the Japanese, at the beginning, set the final deadline in order to try to successfully end the negotiations on October 15<sup>th</sup>. However, when this date was reached, no decision has been taken and Prince Konoye's government, that was in power until that moment, resigned. The following government, under General Tojo's leadership, can be seen 'not as a regime determined to take the nation into war but rather as one still seeking a way out of the dilemma' (Russett, 1967, page 90). For this reason, it was decided that the negotiations could continue but a new deadline was set on November 25<sup>th</sup> (Russett, 1967). In fact, what is interesting to note is that the immediate cause for the attack on Pearl Harbor can be seen in the US refusal, on November

26<sup>th</sup>, of a final offer made by Japan with the aim of solving this dispute in a peaceful manner. Obviously, the Japanese were completely dissatisfied by this refusal and, in that moment, it became evident that a war was about to come. However, as Toland (2014) noted, it is relevant to consider the fact that, even though the US President Roosevelt sent a warning message to the base of Pearl Harbor, Admiral Kimmel, who was in charge in the US naval base in the Hawaii, underestimated its importance. Indeed, even though all the signals of an imminent attack were present, there was the conviction, within the US, that ‘it couldn’t happen here’ (Janis, 1972, page 76). Indeed, as Wohlstetter (1962) stated, it was ‘an “improbable” choice’ and all the American administration agreed on this (page vii). In fact, among the targets that, according to the US, were most likely to be hit by the Japanese, the base of Pearl Harbor was missing. Therefore, one element that is fundamental to consider is that ‘they all believed in and acted on the basis of an extreme sense of invulnerability – until the Japanese bombs began to explode’ (Janis, 1972, page 76). On one hand, a partial explanation for this sense of invulnerability can be seen in the US perception of Japanese weakness; on the other hand, another reason can be seen in the belief in the power of the American intelligence. In fact, on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the US administration assured that they were still negotiating the peace with Japan (Buhl, 1996). At the same time, however, in Japan they were organizing the attack. In this regard, they decided to put together an incredible force composed of battleships, destroyers, cruisers and so forth that had to hit the US Army and Navy at Pearl Harbor on December 8<sup>th</sup> at dawn, Tokyo time (Buhl, 1996). The goal was the ‘neutralization of the U.S. Fleet at Pearl Harbor, followed immediately by strong simultaneous attacks against the Philippines and Malaya’ which, in turn, were the real Japanese targets due to their availability of raw materials (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 340). In this way, it was hoped that the United States would have found themselves not willing to undertake a long war against Japan. At the end, the Japanese fulfilled their aim and, at 7:53 of December 7<sup>th</sup>, with the code word ‘TORA, TORA, TORA!’, which meant that the US had been taken by surprise, they started to attack Pearl Harbor (Buhl, 1996). In this sense, by looking at the data, what can be said is that ‘Some 183 fighter, bombers, and torpedo planes participated in the first wave and 168 in the second; 28 submarines and five two-man’ (Mueller, 1992, page 173). Therefore, the results ‘were sudden, concentrated, and dramatic’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page viii). Indeed, what can be stated is that:

the vast majority of naval officers and men were on weekend leave or just getting up from their bunks. The Japanese were able to drop their bombs at will on the ninety-six American ships at anchor. They sank or damaged all eight battleships in the harbor as well as three cruisers and four other vessels. More than two thousand men were killed, most of them Navy personnel; at least as many were wounded or missing. Most of the Navy buildings and Army aircraft installation were completely destroyed (Janis, 1972, page 77).

However, what is interesting to consider is that, at the end, for the United States this attack ‘was more of an inconvenience than a disaster’ from a military perspective (Mueller, 1992, page 186). Indeed, even though the Japanese successfully damaged many American aircrafts and ships, a high number of strategic targets were left untouched. Moreover, it is important to underline that, from the Japanese perspective, although the attack was a success in its initial surprise effect, at the end they obtained a result which was the opposite of what they wanted. Indeed, on one hand, the United States declared war to Japan and, on the other hand, it led to the creation of the so-called ‘victory disease’ (Mueller, 1992). In fact, the Japanese believed that, after their triumph, the Americans would not have been willing to fight and, consequently, they ‘launched themselves carelessly into a vast and overly ambitious adventure’ that aimed at invading a high number of European colonies in Asia (Mueller, 1992, page 193).

What can be said is that, by considering a strictly American point of view, what was relevant for many scholars was to try to understand why did this failure occurred. In this sense, many different theories and explanations were formulated over the years; however, what is interesting is that neither of these researches agree with the others. In fact, every scholar took into consideration a different aspect and, consequently, many different narratives today exist regarding this international crisis. For example, in some cases the US intelligence was considered responsible for this disaster (Wohlstetter, 1962). On the other hand, in other cases, the problem were considered to be the military commanders both in Washington and in the Hawaii that did not understand the signals and, consequently, that did not enforce the right actions to protect the Fleet. In this regard, one of the most accredited study is the book made by Roberta Wohlstetter in 1962. In her book, in fact, she decided to analyse the reports made by the Joint Committee in the months preceding the attack in order to understand what went wrong within the United States in 1941. At the end, what she argued was that ‘the problem was not that the military commanders were incompetent or that there had been a lack of intelligence. [...] The problem was rather in the analysis of that intelligence’ (Wohlstetter, 1962 in Dahl, 2013, page 31). Indeed, the United States could rely on a vast amount of different sources of information: among them, important were the role of the Ambassador Grew in Tokyo, the information given to the US by the British and Dutch allies, the radio calls and the use of the so-called MAGIC, the system used to decipher Japanese secret messages (Wohlstetter, 1962). The problem was that, due to a series of problems, they did not use this information to predict Japanese moves. For example, even though on November 24<sup>th</sup> the chief of naval operations in Washington Harold Stark warned Kimmel that they had to be prepared for a possible Japanese attack, in Hawaii the officials continued to feel safe since that they assumed that ‘Pearl Harbor would not be a target of Japanese attacks’ (Janis, 1972, page

78). However, what both Janis (1972) and Wohlstetter (1962) stated is that Admiral Kimmel and his advisers were not the only one believing that Pearl Harbour would have been safe in case of attack. Indeed, as it was said earlier, thanks to the use of all these sources of information, they were able to predict the possible Japanese targets, and Pearl Harbor was not among them. Moreover, it is fundamental to consider that ‘signals announcing the Pearl Harbor attack were always accompanied by competing or contradictory signals, by all sorts of information useless for anticipating this disaster’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 3). This ‘noise’, as Wohlstetter calls it, was very useful for the Japanese since it hid their real intentions until the last moment. Despite this, Janis (1972) in his book presented evidences of the fact that, in the Hawaii, the officials were still preparing the men and the equipment to be ready to fight in the Pacific.

MAGIC, from a historical point of view, is one of the most fascinating aspects of the attack on Pearl Harbor. In fact, it was the ‘mastery of the Japanese codes and ciphers’ achieved by the United States in 1940 (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 170). The possibility of deciphering all the Japanese message represented a huge advantage for the United States in that period since they could read every day all the messages sent by the Japanese administration to all its embassies around the world. For obvious reasons, only few people within the United States knew about MAGIC; indeed, the power of this ‘weapon’ laid exclusively in the fact that the Japanese did not know about it (Wohlstetter, 1962). What can be said is that, thanks to MAGIC, the United States in 1941 received ‘plenty of warning signals showing that Japan was getting ready for massive military operations, but it did not inform the Americans exactly where’ (Janis, 1972, page 77). Moreover, a second problem was that, since only few people were authorized to know about it, there had never been the chance to read all these messages in sequence in order to notice the existence of possible trends (Wohlstetter, 1962). Finally, another problem was that Japan used more than one secret code to send their messages and it was impossible, for the US intelligence, to decrypt all of them. For this reason, the Americans created a system of priority: all the messages signed as PURPLE had to be translated before the others (Wohlstetter, 1962). However, even though in Pearl Harbor Admiral Kimmel and General Short intercepted PURPLE messages, they simply sent them to Washington for the translation since that ‘they were denied the use of MAGIC’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 186). In this sense, what can be stated is that these weaknesses, combined with the wrong illusion of invulnerability described earlier, was fatal to the United States.

Finally, a last interesting aspect of the attack on Pearl Harbor is the fact that it led to the creation of what Roskin (1974) called ‘Pearl Harbor Paradigm’ which lasted well after the end of the Second World War. Indeed, the foreign policy decision taken by the US throughout all its history can be seen

as a succession of 'paradigms' which regard 'whether the country's defence should start on the near or far side of the oceans' (Roskin, 1974, page 563). On one side, in the case in which the country decides to fight even in crises which happen outside and far from the borders, this is called interventionist paradigm. On the other side, when the country prefers not to be involved in other countries' crises, it is called isolationist approach. Generally speaking, what Roskin (1974) argues is that each paradigm has a birth, a growth and an end. In this sense, the birth is usually linked with the rising in criticisms made against the old paradigm, that proved to be wrong, and the consequent shift of a high number of influent people towards the new one. This, in turn, is precisely what happened after December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Indeed, the interventionists were able to demonstrate that they were right in saying that 'an isolated America was impossible' (Roskin, 1974, page 568). In this regard, it is relevant Allison and Halperin's (1972) thesis. Indeed, they stated that this attack 'affected the perceptions of many Americans about whether the national security required American forces to engage in war against Japan' (Allison and Halperin, 1972, page 60). In this sense, another interesting aspect of the attack on Pearl Harbor is that it became a model of scenario that would have been originated in case of nuclear war. Sagan (1988) describes it as 'a lingering concern that can be described as *hormephobia*, the fear of shock or surprise' (page 893). In this sense, the Japanese attack of 1941 is often used to promote 'the development of strategic defenses in order to protect the American people from potentially irrational acts' (Sagan, 1988, page 894).

### 3.2.2 – *Risk attitude during the attack on Pearl Harbor*

In order to understand why the decision to attack was taken, it is important to underline the functioning of the decision-making process in Japan. In fact, the major decisions concerning this crisis were taken throughout the so-called Liaison Conferences, during which both the members of the Cabinet and of the Supreme Command were present. During the second half of 1941 they met several times and their main purpose was 'to coordinate the activities of the civilian government and the military' (Levi and Whyte, 1997). Then, once the members of the Liaison Conferences had reached a decision, they had to present it to the Emperor during the Imperial Conferences and he had the role of approving or denying it (Levi and Whyte, 1997). Moreover, a second element that is important to consider in this context is the Japanese decision-making culture. Indeed, it is different from the Western one which is based on majority. In Japan, in fact, people 'are believed to be extremely collectivistic' and, therefore, a decision is taken when the participants find a unanimous agreement (Takano and Sogon, 2008, page 237). This technique is usually called consensus decision-making process and it reflects 'cultural influences and preferences for collective responsibility and accountability' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 798). What is interesting about it is that it is based on

two elements: the first one is called *ringi* and it means that, in the majority of the cases, the political decisions are taken by groups (Watabe et al, 1992). The second is called *nemawashi*: it happens when the organization takes the information and tries to develop a common position (Watabe et al, 1992). In fact, the most important aspect of this technique consists in trying to limit the disagreements and to improve cooperation. In other words, it is a system which is based on mutual reliance: it ‘places emphasis on the interrelationship of groups within the Japanese decision-making process, rather than a system of “the rule of the higher by the lower”’ (Hosoya, 1974, page 366). In this sense, it is interesting what Keys and Miller (1984) stated in this regard:

it is advanced that a consensus decision, though mediocre, can yield better outcomes than an imposed decision, though brilliant, because of the support of employees, their knowledge of the decision parameters, and their commitment to successful execution of the decisions. Further, the considerable time that goes into defining the issue reduces the risk that a preconceived solution will prevent proper definition of the problem (page 345).

However, one important weakness of the consensus culture concerns the fact that the groups are very often affected by Groupthink. Indeed, as was underlined by Janis (1972), there is the risk that the decision-makers will ignore relevant but contradictory information only to maintain cohesion within the group. A similar thesis was sustained by Russett (1967): in fact, he stated that, due to high levels of stress, there is a high probability that the decision-makers within an organization may fail to consider important information. Therefore, a second weakness regard the fact that, by ignoring information, the organization lacks in creativity. Alternatively, there is the risk that, even though the decision-makers receive the information, they distort it in such a serious way that their considerations about the possible outcomes are completely wrong (Janis, 1972). Finally, another weakness of this system is that, in order to reach a solution, the parties have to waste a lot of time since it is not so immediate to reach a unanimous consensus (Levi and Whyte, 1997).

By taking in consideration all the aspects described in the previous paragraph and in order to understand the level of risk undertaken by the Japanese administration in 1941, what is important to highlight is that:

In the eyes of the Tokyo decision-makers, the decision to attack the United States was compared, not to an act of suicide, but rather to a desperate but necessary operation given to a man with a terminal disease (Sagan, 1988, page 895).

For this reason, the principle that was followed by the Japanese was ‘the sooner, the better’: in fact, there was the belief that, the sooner the Japanese would have attacked, the higher the probability of

succeeding (Buhl, 1996). In this sense, the four main options that, at the end, were presented to the Emperor were the following:

1. The first alternative was the invasion of the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. This can be considered an extremely risky option since that it involved a direct attack against European colonies which were US allies;
2. To attack Pearl Harbor was the second possibility that, even in this case, involved an extremely high level of risk since it was an attack directly against a US territory;
3. The third option concerned the acceptance of the status quo by letting the US, the UK and the other great Western countries to control them minimizing, in this way, the Japanese industry. This was, of the four alternatives, the only cautious one but the problem was that it would have entailed a loss for Japan since that they would have had to renounce to some power;
4. Finally, the fourth and last possibility, which entailed a medium-high level of risk, was to attack the Soviet Union in order to help Germany during Operation Barbarossa (Buhl, 1996).

What can be said is that three out of four of these options involved the use of violence and, consequently, the level of risk was extremely high considering that, at least in the first two alternatives, a war against the United States could not be avoided. In this sense, what Brown (1977) argued is that, at the beginning, the plan was to attack only Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. Indeed, the main Japanese concern was to obtain those resources and raw materials that the embargo imposed by the US deprived them of. However, the problem with this plan was that they were sure that, in this way, they would have to face a counterattack promoted by the US (Buhl, 1996). In this situation, consequently, the risks were considered to be too high and the chances of winning too low. For this reason, they changed the plan and they decided to attack 'the vulnerable United States naval and air fleet located at Pearl Harbor' (Brown, 1977, page 6). However, even considering this second plan, the level of risk was huge. In this sense, it is interesting what Russett (1967) stated in his paper:

In deciding to attack Pearl Harbor the Japanese took what they fully recognized to be a great risk. There is no doubt but that the Imperial government realized it could not win a long war with the United States if the Americans chose to fight such a war. Japanese strategists calculated that America's war potential was seven to eight times greater than their own; they knew that Japan could not hope to carry the war to the continental United States (page 98).

In conclusion, by considering all the elements explained so far, what can be stated is that, on one side, due, in particular, to the presidential elections of November 1940 that constrained



Roosevelt's position, in the US there was the adoption of a cautious policy. In fact, apart from the anxiety linked with a possible outbreak of a Pacific war, people within the US feared even that 'actions taken to deter further Japanese expansion might backfire and provoke rather than prevent aggression' (Sagan, 1988, page 901). For these reasons, even though Britain continued asking for a more active American action against Japan, Roosevelt decided not to worsen the situation. However, what some scholars noted is that, soon after the victory at the elections, there was a shift towards a more risky attitude (Sagan, 1988). In fact, Roosevelt made it clear to Japanese that, in case of aggression to the British or Dutch colonies, the United States would have been forced to declare war against Japan. However, both in Japan and in the US, many people did not completely believe in this statement: in fact, they perceived it as an action forced by the UK and the Netherlands. On the other side, from the Japanese perspective, the policy that was adopted since the beginning was a violent and risky one. Indeed, in their view, they had only two possibilities to end this dispute with the US: 'the first was to continue negotiating with the United States [...]. The second was to speed war preparations, set a deadline for negotiations, and initiate war before winter' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 799-800). What can be said is that, although there were many discussions between those who accepted a hard line of action and those who preferred a more moderate one, at the end, by November 1941, they all agreed on the necessity to undertake such a risky move as soon as possible. In this case, consequently, what can be argued is that, in general, the group polarization, the risky shift, the Groupthink phenomena and the prospect theory find support.

However, in order to confirm or deny this hypothesis, it is interesting to analyse the studies made by Levi and Whyte (1997), Janis (1972) and Russett (1967). These scholars, in fact, tried to apply respectively the Prospect theory, the Groupthink theory and the Rational Model theory to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In particular, what is interesting to note is that, contrary to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis described earlier in which these scholars decided to analyse the level of risk during the first week of crisis, the researches on the attack on Pearl Harbor focus exclusively on the level of risk which preceded the attack. In this sense, another aspect that has to be underlined is the complexity of this case-study: in fact, two different points of view, the Japanese and the US ones, can be taken as basis in order to explain the risk-taking behaviour of the different groups involved in this decision-making process. Consequently, what can be stated is that, since Levi and Whyte and Russett studied the Japanese perspective while Janis the US one, throughout this thesis both groups will be considered and analysed. Moreover, another interesting thing about these three studies is that, despite these differences in theories and perspectives, they all agreed on the fact that, at the end, both the US and Japan promoted a risky-shift.

On one side, Levi and Whyte (1997) and Russett (1967) decided to apply, respectively, the Prospect theory and the Rational Model theory taking into consideration only the Japanese point of view. Therefore, they analysed only the decisions taken by the Japanese administration during the Liaison Conferences. What is important to say in this regard is the fact that these conferences were held by 'Members of the Cabinet (the prime minister, war minister, finance minister, and director of the planning board [...]) and members of the Supreme Command (the Army and Navy chiefs and vice-chief)' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 799). Moreover, another interesting aspect regarding this group is that there were two factions within it: the hard-liners, so those who were willing to accept a higher level of risk and wanted to attack the US. These were the 'Army Chief of Staff Sugiyama, Navy Chief of Staff Nagano, Army Vice-Chief of Staff Tsukada, War and Prime Minister Tojo, and Planning Board President Suzuki' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 800). On the other hand, there were those who did not want to accept such a high level of risk and that preferred a more cautious solution: they were 'Prime Minister Konoye, Minister of Home Affairs Hiranuma, President of the Privy Council Hara, Foreign Minister Togo, and Finance Minister' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 800).

On the other side, Janis (1972), in his book, was the only one who decided to focus exclusively on the US perspective. Consequently, he focused especially on the decisions taken by Admiral Kimmel and his advisers. This was a large group composed as follow:

four key men on Kimmel's staff with whom he conferred nearly every day [...] - Captains William W. Smith, Walter Delany, Charles H. McMorris, and Arthur C. Davis. Also in attendance at the staff conferences or at private conferences with Kimmel were Marine Colonel Omar T. Pfeiffer, Lieutenant Commander Edwin T. Layton, and several other members of the admiral's staff. In addition, Kimmel asked a number of commanders of the fleet to attend conferences at his headquarters [...] -Vice Admirals Walter S. Anderson, Wilson Brown, William L. Calhoun, William F. Halsey, Herbert F. Leary, William S. Pye, Rear Admiral Milo Draemel, and a few others. Also present at important conferences were Admiral Claude C. Bloch [...] and sometimes Bloch's chief of staff, Captain John Earle (Janis, 1972, page 80).

Finally, what is relevant to say is that, in order to better understand these three researches and the results that they obtained, it is necessary to examine the sources that they used. First of all, Levi and Whyte (1997), similarly to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, decided to analyse the transcripts of the Liaison Conferences. In fact, in this way, it is possible to understand which was the point of view of each person within this group. On the other hand, Janis (1972), as it was stated for the case of the 1962 Missile Crisis, decided to use only secondary sources, so documents or books, to take the general information and, then, he developed and reinterpreted them. Finally, Russett (1967) adopted

both primary and secondary sources in order to build his thesis. Indeed, he combined sources such as memoirs or transcripts of direct statements made by the Japanese leaders with information taken by documents and books. In this way, it was possible to understand both what the people directly involved in the crisis thought and believed and what other scholars have stated regarding the reasons behind the attack on Pearl Harbor.

#### *A. The Prospect Theory and the attack on Pearl Harbor: Levi and Whyte's research*

Similarly to the study regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis described earlier, Levi and Whyte (1997), in their paper, decided to analyse the Japanese point of view during the attack on Pearl Harbor adopting the Prospect theory and, in particular, the idea of reference point. Indeed, what can be stated is that 'the key to understanding the impact of Prospect theory [...] becomes the identification of the reference point' (Boettcher III, 2004, page 333). In particular, according to Levi and Whyte, the reference point in this international crisis was created thanks to a statement made during the Imperial Conference of July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1941. The statement was the following:

Our Empire is determined to follow a policy that will result in the establishment of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and will thereby contribute to world peace, no matter what changes may occur in the world situation (Ike, 1967, page 78).

In other words, the creation of the Co-Prosperity Sphere represented the main Japanese goal and all the possible actions were evaluated using it as reference point. Therefore, the maintenance of the status quo that existed in 1941, with the embargo and the US dominance, was considered 'a sure and substantial loss' which, consequently, led the Japanese to frame the situation in a negative way (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 800). What these two scholars stated is that this negative frame, in turn, was made stronger by two factors: the first was that the embargo enforced by the US was perceived as a weakening factor against Japan. In this sense, what can be said is that the more the Japanese perceived this loss, the more they framed this situation in a negative way. In fact, what is important to underline is that, in general, 'The framing of the probabilities associated with various outcomes centers on the subject's understanding of and sensitivity to risk' (Boettcher III, 2004, page 333). The second factor was more economic: indeed, the costs sustained by Japan until that moment in order to reach its territorial goals were extremely high (Buhl, 1996). Consequently, by applying Kahneman and Tversky's (1984) theory, what can be stated is that Japan could not renounce to its ambitions regarding the Co-Prosperity Sphere without perceiving it as a sure loss. In this sense, consistent with Levi and Whyte's research regarding the negative frame and with the fact that Japanese leaders perceived to have only negative options, what Russett (1967) stated is that:

Given the high probability they attached to America's readiness to defend the Indies, their implicit calculations about the utility of attacking the islands worked out to a most unattractive future. But the status quo was also high unpalatable. Whichever of these option had the greatest utility (or least negative utility), however, became an academic question once the strategy of attacking the defender's vulnerable deterrent was conceived. Despite the great risks they doubtless saw in that strategy, it seemed to promise more gains or less loss than either of the former alternatives (page 99).

In this context, if the theoretical base of the Prospect theory is considered, what Kahneman and Tversky (1979) stated is that an individual will tend to be risk seeking when he/she negatively frames the problem and risk averse when the question is framed in a positive way. In particular, being risk-seeking means that there is a 'preference of a loss that is merely probable over a smaller loss that is certain' (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979, page 268-269). Therefore, contrary to the Cuban Missile Crisis, in the case of Pearl Harbor the Japanese decision to undertake such a high level of risk is consistent with Kahneman and Tversky's original theory. Consequently, what can be said is that, at least in theory, Japanese decision should have been predictable. In fact, 'Japanese leaders perceived their choice to be between a certain loss [...] and potentially greater losses if war were declared combined with the chance, however small, that Japan might prevail' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 801).

Moreover, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis case-study, what is important to highlight is the idea of loss aversion. In fact, since people are more affected by a loss than by a gain, they will try to avoid any loss even if this implies taking more risks (Boettcher III, 2004). Moreover, by linking the idea of loss aversion to the international relations, what can be said is that 'wars are most likely when each side believes it will suffer significant losses if it does not fight. [...] When states overestimate others' hostility [...], they will expect losses unless they take strong if not aggressive actions' (Jervis, 1992, page 192). Consequently, what can be assumed is that the states' fear of losing represents the major cause for most international conflict and that 'radical economic plans aim to avoid losses rather than to secure equivalent gains' (Mercer, 2005, page 12). In this case, by looking at the historical events preceding the attack on Pearl Harbor, what can be argued is that 'an aversion to perceived losses of relative power and international status caused Japanese leaders to pursue a series of highly risk-acceptant diplomatic and military strategies' (Taliaferro, 2004, page 95). Indeed, if the Japanese had maintained the status quo, they would have to accept the embargo and, consequently, the reduction of strength for Japan. Of course, this was not acceptable. Another alternative was to negotiate with the United States: in this way, the embargo would have been eliminated but Japan would have been treated as a country of secondary importance (Buhl, 1996). Even this solution was not acceptable.

The third solution, the outbreak of a conflict, was the riskiest one but it was even the only option that, in case of success, would have guaranteed Japan to achieve its aims and to avoid the sure losses entailed in the former two cases. In this sense, what Brown (1977) stated is that ‘war was the “least miserable” option’ (page 4). Therefore, what can be argued is that, since there were no alternatives and that it was impossible to avoid a war, ‘it would be preferable to begin the war on Japan’s terms and schedule’ (Buhl, 1996, page 70). And this is what, at the end, they did.

Similarly to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, what can be said is that Levi and Whyte’s (1997) main aim in their paper is to try to understand whether the presence of a reference point affected the final group’s decision and its tendency towards risk. Consequently, they stated that, in order to assess whether the Prospect theory can be applied to this case-study or not, it is important to understand, first of all, if the group that had decided for the beginning of the Pacific war used a reference level during the decision-making process. In order to answer to this question, they started with the creation of five main hypotheses:

1. The group used a reference point and framed the situation as a choice between losses;
2. All the arguments favouring the risky alternative will contain a higher number of linkages with the reference level than the more cautious arguments;
3. The decision-makers which agree on the riskier alternative will present a higher number of arguments concerning the fact that their status quo in that moment is under the reference level;
4. The group polarization hypothesis will be strengthened since that, after the discussion, the group’s preference will shift towards the riskiest alternative;
5. ‘The difference between the proportions of reference-point-related arguments given in the Liaison Conferences versus the Imperial Conferences will be greater for risk-averse than for risk-seeking decision makers’ (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 803).

In this sense, what is important to underline in this second case is the method that was chosen by these two scholars in order to verify these five hypotheses. Indeed, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis they chose to use the transcripts of the ExComm meetings, in this case they decided to use the transcripts of the Liaison and Imperial Conferences (Levi and Whyte, 1997). For this reason, they took as starting point the transcripts that were published by Ike (1967) and, among them, a particular attention was placed to the Conferences held from July 2<sup>nd</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup>.

At the end, the results that they obtained by analysing the transcripts confirmed the hypothesis number one. Indeed, they discovered that 56% of the arguments (20 out of 36) were linked with the

reference level (Levi and Whyte, 1997). Furthermore, they managed to confirm even the negative frame that was adopted during these Conferences. As Levy (2003) stated, in fact, ‘By fall 1941 key Japanese decision-makers believed that their current position could only deteriorate’ (page 228). In fact, as it was said earlier, Japan perceived that it could choose only among undesirable options: to maintain the status quo or to negotiate with the United States in order to eliminate the embargo. However, in both situations, their loss was sure: in the first case, they would have lost strength and, in the second case, they would have been forced to renounce to their territorial ambitions. In this sense, it is interesting is what Levy (2003) stated in his paper. Indeed, he said that this negative frame promoted by the Japanese decision-makers could only worsen with the rising power of the US. Therefore, it became fundamental to act as soon as possible and, consequently, they ‘gambled at long odds on a risky preventive war to consolidate their regional hegemony while the opportunity was still available’ (Levy, 2003, page 229). Concerning the second hypothesis, what Levi and Whyte (1997) stated is that, of 36 arguments, 24 were in favour either of the cautious line of action or the hard line of action. The remaining twelve arguments favoured an attack towards the Soviet Union. Moreover, of these 24 arguments, only five of them, which were not linked to the reference point, supported the enforcement of a cautious solution (Levi and Whyte, 1997). The other 19 arguments favoured the risky solution and 14 of them were linked to the reference level. This is related even with the hypothesis number three: indeed, 65% of the arguments given by hard-liners and 38% of those given by the moderate were linked with the reference level. In this sense, what Levi and Whyte (1997) argue is that, even though these data are useful in order to verify this hypothesis, their statistical value is limited. Therefore, there is only marginal support for the third hypothesis. Finally, even the fifth hypothesis was confirmed. In fact, they found out that, on one hand, the hard-liners presented arguments related to the reference point both in the Liaison and Imperial Conferences. In particular, what can be said is that these arguments emphasized ‘the long-term political and economic costs of not attacking over the short-term military costs of attacking’ (Brown, 1977, page 4). On the other hand, the moderates gave only arguments non-related to the reference point in the Liaison Conferences but, in the Imperial Conferences, only few arguments of this type were made.

However, for the aim of this thesis, the most relevant hypothesis is the fourth one since that Levi and Whyte tried to verify the group polarization theory. As it was underlined by Myers and Lamm (1976), a crucial element for this theory is the group discussion since it can promote the shift of the group’s members towards more extreme options. In this regard, what can be stated by reading the transcripts made by Ike (1967) is that, during the discussions made in the months before the attack, there was not a clear unanimity regarding the solution to be adopted. In this sense, what is relevant to

underline is that, within the moderate faction there was even Prince Konoye, who maintained the power until the middle of October, and, among the hard-liners there was General Tojo, who became Prime Minister right after Prince Konoye. Thus, what can be argued is that, in this case-study, the leaders and their desires played a primary role in promoting the shift towards either the more cautious or the riskiest option: in fact, until October 15<sup>th</sup>, the discussions were still open since that an unanimity was not formed yet. However, after General Tojo's election as Prime Minister all changed. In fact, 'By November 5, even the moderates had come to subscribe to the view that war would be inevitable unless the United States accepted Japan's demand' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 807). By considering all these aspects, what can be stated is that this shift towards the risky option was consistent with the group polarization theory. Indeed, the final decision 'was even riskier than the option that would have been preferred on average by group members at the outset of the 1941 Liaison Conferences' (Levi and Whyte, 1997, page 807). This can be seen even as the result of a tendency towards self-censorship which, in turn, was dictated by the consensus culture. Indeed, it became easier for the decision-makers to simply agree with the majority of the group rather than to cause problems. Therefore, the main question shifted from 'Has Japan to start a war?' to 'When and how will be better for Japan to start a war?'. This change increased the polarization towards the riskiest solution. In conclusion, what can be said is that, in general, when the reference point is known, it is possible to predict which will be the level of risk accepted by the group. However, in the Japanese context, the consensus decision-making culture can probably be seen as a better conductor of the group polarization effect.

Finally, probably the most important contribution given by Levi and Whyte (1997) in this paper concerns the fact that, through the analysis of the five propositions described earlier, they were able to confirm again the possibility to apply the Prospect theory to groups' decisions under risk. In particular, the use of the reference point proved to be valid not only in the case-study linked with the Cuban Missile Crisis but even in the crisis of Pearl Harbor. In this sense, some common characteristics of these two cases concerned the fact that both the American and the Japanese administrations framed their status quo in a negative way and both used the reference point in order to find a solution. Moreover, in both cases, the role of loss aversion cannot be underestimated. However, as can be easily seen, the use of the reference level led the United States during the Cuban Missile Crisis to a cautious shift and Japan in 1941 to a risky shift.

### *B. The Groupthink Phenomenon and the attack on Pearl Harbor: Janis' research*

Concerning Janis' (1972) theory, what can be said is that the attack on Pearl Harbor was one of the four cases in which, according to him, some major symptoms of Groupthink were present and

affected the group's final decision. In fact, what is important to underline is that, in theory, when Groupthink is present, groups tend to adopt riskier decision. In this sense, Janis' (1972) analysis of the attack on Pearl Harbor clearly demonstrate this assumption. However, it is important to highlight the fact that, if, on one hand, Levi and Whyte's (1997) research was based on the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor; on the other hand, Janis (1972) decided to explain this crisis focusing exclusively on the risk accepted by the United States with their decision to do nothing to stop Japan. Consequently, he tried to explain this risk-acceptant behaviour of the US with the adoption of his theory regarding Groupthink.

First of all, it is important to highlight that Janis' methodology for the analysis of the events surrounding the attack on Pearl Harbor consisted in the understanding of the decisions taken by Admiral Kimmel and his advisers which were located in the US base in the Hawaii. One important feature about this group is that it can be considered as one 'of the most distinguished lists of [military] advisers that have been assembled at one time under any man's command' (Janis, 1972, page 80). Moreover, a second aspect that is relevant to highlight regarding this group is that, according to Janis (1972), strong evidences of the fact that it was a cohesive group whose members were loyal to Kimmel existed. In fact, not only they worked together, but they were also friends. Therefore, in such a context, Kimmel was able to talk freely, to express his anxieties and to be reassured by the other advisers (Janis, 1972). This freedom perceived by Kimmel is fundamental because, generally speaking, a statement that can be made regards the fact that 'decision-makers are at the mercy of what their advisors and associates tell them' (Buhl, 1996, pages 33-34). This, in turn, is relevant because it is exactly what happened the day before the attack: Kimmel, in fact, was worried about the worsening signs which indicated that the Japanese could attack the US Fleet in Pearl Harbor and his advisers reassured him about the impossibility of this event. Consequently, according to Janis (1972) Kimmel did not take the adequate actions to protect the US Fleet and he failed to consider all the messages coming from Washington indicating the possibility of an attack.

By taking into account all these factors, what can be stated is that Janis' (1972) main aim in his analysis about the attack on Pearl Harbor is to understand why Kimmel with his advisers and Roosevelt with the War Council failed to consider that an attack could happen in the Hawaii. In this sense, the answer that was given by Janis (1972) in his book is that, in general, 'when Groupthink dominates, the members of a decision-making group share a sense of complacency and fail to respond to warnings' (page 75). This, in turn, is exactly what happened in the US in 1941 and the most plausible explanations for this failure, in his view, include a shared sense of invulnerability, rationalization and the development of wishful thinking. For what concerns the first of these three



elements, what Janis (1972) stated is that, among the high officials in the US, there was the belief that nobody was going to attack the US Fleet in the Pacific. Moreover, thanks to the use of MAGIC, they were quite sure of the fact that the Hawaii were not a Japanese target (Janis, 1972). In this sense, they all relied on the fact that, in case of attack, the Fleet could have warned them and, consequently, they believed that ‘the situation permitted of emphasizing training at the expense of security’ (Janis, 1972, page 76). This false illusion of invulnerability is due to several factors: among them, it is important to consider that all the decision-makers agreed on the fact that, thanks to MAGIC, they could have known in advance Japanese plans. Moreover, a second possible explanation is linked with the development of false stereotypes regarding the enemy: in fact, according to Janis (1972), the Japanese were seen as too weak to really adopt such a risky decision against a powerful state as it was the US. This, in turn, led to the creation of another symptom of Groupthink: rationalization. Indeed, the decision-makers created ‘a set of shared beliefs that rationalize their complacency about the soundness of their policy decisions’ (Janis, 1972, page 87). One clear example of this tendency can be seen in the fact that, in US decision-makers’ minds, it was impossible that ‘a power as small as Japan would make the first strike against a power as big as the United States’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 349). Consequently, they were firmly convinced of the adequacy of the plans that had been adopted so far in order to protect the US. Indeed, in this sense, it is important to consider even the fact that ‘the United States had a war potential seven or eight times greater than that of Japan’ and that they relied a lot on this factor as a deterrent of possible attacks (Brown, 1977, page 3). Moreover, even when they realized that Japan was ready to launch an attack against the US, the decision-makers believed that the Japanese would have focused only in the Dutch or British colonies. The possibility of a multiple attack against both the US and the British and Dutch colonies was not considered at all. In other words, they failed to take into account relevant information that would have led them to reconsider the strengths and weaknesses of other possible solutions (Janis, 1972). In fact, what can be stated about illusion of invulnerability and rationalization is that: ‘Shared illusion of invulnerability [...] can reduce anxiety about taking risks. Rationalizations help members believe that the risks are really not so bad after all’ (Shafritz et al, 2015, page 167). Finally, a third element that is important to consider is that ‘in conditions of great uncertainty people tend to predict that events that they want to happen actually will happen’ (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 397). This phenomenon is what Janis (1972) defined as ‘wishful thinking’ and it is another symptom of Groupthink that was present in the US in 1941.

What is interesting about the research made by Janis (1972) is that the elements that usually lead to Groupthink are not present in the case of Pearl Harbor. Some examples can be seen, for

instance, in the fact that ‘there is no indication of promotional leadership for the consensus policy’ (McCauley, 1989, page 255). In fact, as it was said earlier, Kimmel was worried about the possibility of a Japanese attack. Moreover, the group was not closed to information coming from outside: indeed, they received all the news by Washington that, in turn, they obtained thanks to MAGIC. A third ‘strange’ element was the fact that the decision-makers within the group did not feel any stress (Janis, 1972). In fact, they were absolutely sure that Pearl Harbor was not a Japanese target and that, consequently, it was safe. Therefore, according to Janis (1972) they never had problems linked with low self-esteem and they had never been worried of failing. This, in turn, is probably the reason why they never tried to balance the pros and cons of each alternative: in fact, they did not perceive it as a situation involving a variety of different possible alternatives (McCauley, 1989).

Moreover, another important element underlined by Janis related to the development of groupthink in the US is linked with the three groups that had to take the decisions. In fact, what Janis (1972) noted is that the three actors which were responsible for these wrong decisions regarding Pearl Harbor, e.g. the Navy and the Army in Hawaii and the War Council, ‘mutually reinforced their lack of vigilance, often by what they did not say’ (page 100). Indeed, what can be stated is that they cared more about being part of the group and being a cohesive group than about reaching sound decisions. In fact, ‘The three groups helped each other maintain a facade of complacency; thus they helped set the stage for America’s unpreparedness’ (Walsh, 1989, page 20). This is particularly true if the relationship between Kimmel and his advisers is considered: in fact, in order to maintain the sense of unanimity, the friendship with the leader and to be part of the group, they did not say anything which could create problems or dissents (Janis, 1972).

Finally, considering in particular this last aspects, what can be assumed is that, when the group’s members self-censor their ideas and beliefs, the result is that the final decisions that are taken are, in general, poor and risky. In fact, as Buhl (1996) stated, ‘The introduction of imperfect information and manipulation may conspire to compound the possibility of a suboptimal outcome’ (page 24). In this sense, what is interesting is that this idea, in turn, can be applied not only to the US administration but even to the Japanese one. Indeed, due to the consensus culture, all the decision-makers have to agree when they have to take decisions. This, in turn, implies that all the critics and doubts concerning a possible solution have to be suppressed (Levi and Whyte, 1997). In fact, as it was stated in the previous paragraphs, from the middle of October to the beginning of December all the members of the Japanese administration that wanted a moderate solution changed their minds. This, as Takano and Sogon (2008) stated, can be resumed by saying that the Japanese are usually seen as ‘those who maintain harmony within an in-group by willingly conforming to the group and sacrificing themselves

for the sake of the group' (page 237). Therefore, there is a high probability for groupthink attitudes to emerge in this country. Consequently, in all likelihood, with more accurate researches on this issue what can be discovered is that major symptoms of groupthink were present even in Japan in 1941 and that these symptoms affected the final decision. In this sense, what is interesting is the application of the six criteria described by Janis in order to evaluate the decision-making process developed by groups. As it was stated for the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, in fact, a group reaches sound decisions when:

1. The group has taken into consideration a wide range of possible alternatives;
2. The decision-makers have evaluated all the possible risks, costs and gains;
3. The group have repeatedly searched for information which can be relevant in order to analyse the possible choices;
4. The group's members have taken into consideration all the information and the different experts' points of view, even when they are against the initial position of the group itself;
5. The decision-makers have re-analysed all the possible consequences of all the possible alternatives;
6. Finally, they have 'made detailed provisions for executing the chosen course of action' (Janis, 1972, page 142).

By applying these six concepts to the attack on Pearl Harbor, what can be noted is that the majority of these criteria were missing. This, however, is true both for the American and Japanese decisions. For example, neither of the two sides have evaluated all the possible costs, risks and alternatives nor they have taken into account all the different experts' points of view (Janis, 1972). Therefore, what can be concluded is that the decision-making processes developed both in the US and in Japan were not so good. This, consistently with Janis' theory, led to the phenomenon of groupthink to spread in both these administrations and to risky decisions to be taken.

In conclusion, it is interesting to analyse the table that can be seen in Figure 4: it is a general resume of all the case-studies developed by Janis (1972) in his book. In particular, this table is relevant because it focuses on the presence or absence of the major symptoms of Groupthink. Generally speaking, thanks to this table, three things can be noted: first, the fact that group cohesion is not a necessary condition for Groupthink (McCauley, 1989). In fact, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Marshall Plan are the two cases that Janis used to prove that not all the groups are affected by Groupthink. However, in both cases there was a high level of cohesion among the decision-makers. Second, having group insulation, promotional leadership and group homogeneity is usually linked

with poor decision-making processes and, very often, they represents clear symptoms of Groupthink (McCauley, 1989). However, as it was underlined before talking about Pearl Harbor, Groupthink can occur even without these elements. Third and final element is that ‘time pressure, perceived difficulty of decision, and recent group failures do not predict Groupthink or poor decision outcome’ (McCauley, 1989, page 258). This, in turn, can be clearly seen in the Cuban Missile Crisis example.

*Presence or Absence of Compliance and Conditions Conducive to Groupthink for Eight Policy-Making Decisions*

Condition	Bay of Pigs	North Korea	Pearl Harbor	Vietnam	Watergate	Missile crisis		Marshall Plan
						A	B	
Compliance	Yes (38)	No (70)	No (87)	Yes (115)	No	No	No (139)	No (166)
High cohesion	Yes (35)	Yes (49)	Yes (77)	Yes (99)	Yes (233)	Yes (147)	Yes (147)	Yes (169)
Group insulation	Yes (32)	Yes (60)	No (73-5)	No (106)	Yes (234)	Yes (144)	No (141)	No (162)
Promotional leadership	Yes (42)	Yes (67)	No (79)	Yes (115)	Yes (235)	Yes (143)	No (141)	No (166)
Group homogeneity (background & ideology)	No (16)	Yes (49)	Yes (77)	No (99)	Yes (239)	No (16)	No (16)	No (162)
Crisis (time pressure)	No (251)	No (63)	No (281)	Yes (108)	Yes (239)	Yes (134)	Yes (134)	Yes (162)
External threat	Yes (31)	Yes (68)	Yes (80)	Yes (251)	Yes (240)	Yes (251)	Yes (251)	Yes (161)
Perceived difficult decision	Yes (31)	No (55)	No (80)	Yes (122)	Yes (240)	No	Yes (139)	Yes (162)
Recent group failure	No (35)	No	No	Yes (105)	Yes (221)	Yes (139)	Yes (139)	No

Figure 4 – Presence/absence of Groupthink conditions in Janis’ case-studies (McCauley, 1989).

### *C. The Rational Politics Model and the attack on Pearl Harbor: Russett’s research*

First of all, it is important to highlight the fact that two out of three of the Models created by Allison will not be used in this thesis to explain the attack on Pearl Harbor. This choice, in turn, can be explained by saying that, even though Model II and Model III are easy to describe and to sustain from a theoretical point of view, they are very difficult to be put into practice. For example, the main difficulty linked with the application of these two Models to the attack on Pearl Harbor concerns the fact that neither primary nor secondary sources exist and can be used for this purpose. Indeed, no study, research, interview or other primary or secondary source exist for what concerns bargaining games or routines that took place in 1941. On the contrary, what is interesting to note is that some attempts were made by scholars in order to apply Model I to this international crisis. In particular, one of the most relevant and interesting studies over this issue was the one made by Russett (1967). Similarly to what Janis (1972) and Levi and Whyte (1997) did in their papers, Russett tried to understand whether the Japanese attack was a rational or irrational action by analysing the statements made by the decision-makers during the Liaison and Imperial Conferences.

First, in order to properly understand the question of the rationality/irrationality of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Russett’s (1967) starting point can be considered the statement according to which this decision was ‘neither the decision of a single individual [...] nor a decision arrived at under time pressures’ (page 90). For what concerns the first aspect, so the fact that it was not an individual decision, what can be said is that it has to be considered that the final decisions were taken during the

Liaison and Imperial Conferences (Levi and Whyte, 1997). Therefore, it was neither General Tojo's nor Emperor Hirohito's personal decision: due to the consensus culture, in fact, at the end all the decision-makers had to agree on this violent solution. In this sense, what is important to highlight is that, according to Dockrill (1992), the Emperor, at least at the beginning, was in favour of a cautious solution. In fact, he wanted to cooperate with big and powerful countries such as the UK or the US. However, at the end, when the decision was finally taken, 'he was not entirely opposed to Japan's decision to go to war, because he could see no other alternative' (Dockrill, 1992, page 332).

On the other hand, for what concerns the second aspect, so whether or not there was time pressure, a number of scholars, e.g., Wohlstetter (1962) and Levy (1987) agree in saying that Japan had a lot of time to evaluate its decisions. Indeed, already from the summer of 1941 and despite the fact that this would have implied a serious increase in the risk of war with the US, the Japanese administration began to perceive again the need to expand in Asia to obtain raw materials and natural resources (Buhl, 1996). For this reason, they evaluated some possible alternatives and, at the end, they decided for an attack to be perpetuated as soon as possible. Consequently, an important characteristic about the attack on Pearl Harbor is that it can be considered as a preventive war, defined as a war that is fought today in order to avoid the risks of having to fight a war under worsening circumstances in the future. In particular, Levy (1987) argues that, in the case of Pearl Harbor, there were what he calls 'preventive motivations': 'the perception that one's military power and potential are declining relative to that of a rising adversary, and from the fear of the consequences of that decline' (page 87). In fact, the Japanese 'decided to attack the United States when it became convinced that Japan's long-term prospects were not at all attractive' (Brown, 1977, page 4). In this regard, according to Levy (1987), one feature that makes this crisis different from other international crises is that, usually, the preventive motivations let the stronger part within the conflict to attack. On the contrary, in this case, Japan can be considered as the weaker side. However, in this context, what can be argued is that one of the main reasons that led Japan to attack the Hawaii was that they wanted to consolidate their power in Asia (Russett, 1967; Levy, 1987). Moreover, they believed that, first, the only way in order to obtain resources was through a war and, second, that the US would have declared war on Japan if it would have decided to invade European colonies in Asia such as Malaya and the Dutch East Indies (Russett, 1967). This, according to the Japanese, would have happened 'whether or not the Japanese themselves initiated hostilities with America' and, therefore, it represented a rational action (Russett, 1967, page 94). For this reason, Levy (1987) concluded that 'preventive military action can be taken by any state in decline relative to a particular adversary' (page 89).

This idea of preventive war, in turn, is closely linked with another important characteristic used by Russett (1967) to explain the attack on Pearl Harbor: the strategy of deterrence in moments of high tension. Indeed, 'it is precisely those times – great crises – when deterrent threats are most immediate that men are least able to weigh calmly the cost of their acts and the likely of counteraction' (Russett, 1967, page 89). In this sense, what can be stated is that the starting point in order to explain this theory concerns the apparent irrationality of the Japanese decision. In fact, according to Russett (1967), there are some specific aspects of Japanese culture that led them to consider in a wrong way the risks included in the strategy of deterrence enforced by the US. In this sense, what is relevant to say is that Roosevelt's strategy was a sort of ambiguous deterrence: in fact, in order to formally start a war, the United States needed the approval of the Congress. However, before the attack, the isolationist feelings were still strong and it was difficult for the US President to demonstrate that a possible Japanese occupation of Malaya and of the Dutch East Indies would have represented a direct threat for the US (Russett, 1967). Moreover, it is important to consider that, in November 1940, there were the elections in the United States and Roosevelt had to take into account the fact that the American citizens did not want to take so much risk as to start a war in the Pacific (Sagan, 1988, page 901). Consequently, 'proponents of war with Japan looked for Japanese actions which would demonstrate that Japan's objectives were unlimited and threatened American and British possessions' (Allison and Halperin, 1972, page 66). Despite this, what can be said for sure is that the United States had strong strategic interests in that area of the world and, consequently, they started to enforce military actions in order to help the British and the Dutch governments. Therefore, since that Japanese ambitions of invasion of these lands were against the US interests, it follows that 'military action in the Southwest Pacific meant war with the United States' and Japan knew it (Russett, 1967, page 96).

For all these reasons, what many scholars, such as Wohlstetter (1962) and Russett (1967), agree on is the fact that the attack on Pearl Harbor was not totally an irrational action. Indeed, 'Whatever the nature of the decision to go to war, it was arrived at and reinforced over a long period of time, and was not the result of anyone's possibly 'irrational' impulse' (Russett, 1967, page 90). Moreover, Sagan (1988) reinforced this statement by arguing that: 'if one examines the decisions made in Tokyo [...], one finds not a thoughtless rush to national suicide, but rather a prolonged, agonizing debate between two repugnant alternatives' (page 894). However, at the end, for Japan 'war was the only option that offered possible survival' (Brown, 1977, page 7). Therefore, what can be stated is that the beginning of the Pacific war can be seen both as a failure of these strategies of deterrence in the United States and in Japan and a totally rational act. In fact, as Sagan (1988) stated:

The Japanese government wanted to expand into Southeast Asia, but sought to do so while deterring American intervention in support of the European colonial powers. The United States attempted to prevent Japanese expansion, but sought to do so without precipitating war in the Pacific (page 895).

This idea, in turn, is linked with what Allison and Halperin (1972) stated regarding the outbreak of the war. In fact, they argued that, if changes in a nation's behaviour during a crisis occur, consequent changes in the others' behaviour will follow. Regarding the attack on Pearl Harbor, what can be said is that 'the Japanese move made it impossible for Roosevelt to prevent an embargo. The embargo, in turn, so weakened the peace group in Japan that war could not be prevented' (Allison and Halperin, 1972, page 70). However, they all agree on the fact that it was a rational action and that Japan evaluated all the pros and cons of each alternative in order to adopt a solution which would have increased all the possible gains and decreased the losses. Consequently, what can be assumed is that, according to the Rational Model theory, the Japanese administration favoured the risky alternative only because it was the only option that, rationally, would have given them the higher gains in case of success. Resuming, the expected utility of the decision to attack were higher than the costs and the risks involved.

However, some possible weaknesses can be found regarding this approach. For example, what can be said is that one important contribution given by Levi and Whyte (1997) in their paper consists in the denial of the Rational Model as a relevant model to explain this crisis. This can be explained, first, by saying that the decision-makers did not discuss the pros and cons of each possible solution. Indeed, what Levi and Whyte (1997) believe is that the proposals including some Japanese concessions were rejected almost immediately and without discussions. Therefore, they did not choose in the most rational way. One proof of this assumption can be seen in one General Tojo's famous statement made before the attack: 'sometimes a man has to jump from the veranda of the Kiyomizu Temple, with his eyes closed, into the ravine below' (Butow, 1961 in Buhl, 1996, page 72).

Second, what can be added regarding the failure of the Rational Model in the explanation of this crisis concerns the fact that subjective judgements were present during the decision-making process (Levi and Whyte, 1997). One example of this tendency can be seen in the negative perception of Japanese possibility of victory. In fact, what is interesting about Levi and Whyte's (1997) paper is that they managed to prove that 'decision makers' concern with the probability of success declines as the status quo becomes more aversive' (page 808). Thus, decision-makers started to place more importance to the attempts made in order to reach the reference point and to avoid a sure loss than to

the probability of succeeding. In particular, the same organizer of the attack in Pearl Harbor, Admiral Yamamoto, stated: 'I have no confidence in our ultimate victory' (Wohlstetter, 1962, page 350). However, what is relevant is that, even though the decision-makers in Japan knew that the probability of winning against the US were very low, they did not change their choice. Indeed, 'Although they recognized that there was little chance of victory in a long war with the United States, they believed that they had a 70-80% chance of initial success that might improve their bargaining position' (Levy, 2003, page 228). Consequently, what can be assumed is that the aversiveness of the status quo and the necessity to change this negative situation were more important for the Japanese than the possibility to lose. Therefore, the rationality, according to all these scholars, was limited within the Japanese administration. This thesis, in turn, can be easily confirmed by looking at Taliaferro's (2004) book *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery*. Indeed, he stated that:

Japanese leaders perceived themselves facing losses relative to their expectation level. [...] Rather than revise their aspirations downward in response to increasingly desperate military and economic situations, senior officials not only escalated their commitment to a failing war in China, but undertook additional high-risk strategies vis-a-vis other great powers in the region to perpetuate that conflict (Taliaferro, 2004, page 96).

### 3.3 - Conclusions

The main goal of this chapter was to make a confrontation between two of the most dangerous crises of the twentieth century with the aim of understanding the tendency towards risk developed by the groups that had to take the most important decisions during these events. In particular, what can be said is that both the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbor were fundamental events and turning points in history for their ability to promote profound changes in the international arena. However, these two crises developed in completely different ways and they led to opposite results: on one side, the Cuban Missile Crisis ended in a peaceful way; on the other side, the decision to attack Pearl Harbor was a violent and risky one.

In particular, one interesting result about this confrontation is the fact that, even though these crises were completely different, the same theories were successfully applied to both case-studies and managed to explain why in one case there was a cautious shift and in the other a risky shift. Resuming, if the studies made by Levi and Whyte in 1994 and 1997 are considered, what can be said is that the starting point for the evaluation of all the possible alternative solutions in both cases was the reference level. Indeed, the reference point represents a useful instrument in order to evaluate changes in the status quo as gains or losses. What Levi and Whyte were able to prove was that, both in the Cuban



Missile Crisis and in the attack on Pearl Harbor, the presence of a reference level contributed to the negative framing of the situation by the decision-makers. In one case, the reference level was the 'zero nuclear missiles in Cuba' policy adopted by Kennedy; in the other case, it was the creation of the Co-Prosperity Sphere in Asia. Moreover, another similarity of these two case-studies concerns the importance of loss aversion: the idea according to which an individual will do whatever he/she can in order to avoid a sure loss. Regarding this idea of loss aversion, what is interesting is that they managed to apply a concept that usually is individual-based to groups and, at the end, they confirmed that, in situations of loss, individuals and groups act in the same way. Despite this, a possible weakness of the Prospect theory can be seen in the concept of frame. In fact, in Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) original theory, they argued that, on one hand, when a person frames a situation in a positive way, he/she will be risk-averse, while, on the other hand, in case of negative frame, the individual will be risk-seeking. This statement, however, could not be applied to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis: indeed, even though President Kennedy and his advisers framed the situation negatively, at the end they decided to avoid risks. Furthermore, another interesting aspect which arises by the comparison between the two Whyte and Levi's studies is the fact that, even though the same theory was applied to these cases and the same elements were present (negative frame, loss aversion, reference point), at the end the results were one the opposite of the other. Therefore, probably the Prospect theory is not enough per se since that, in order to explain this difference, several external factors have to be considered too: for instance, the role of the leaders and the personality of the decision-makers, the culture, the context, the main interests and positions and so forth. Despite this, another interesting aspect that can be deduced by looking at these two studies is that the role of the single individuals within the group matter. In fact, even though the final decisions were taken by Kennedy, Roosevelt and the Japanese Emperor, the persons within these three administrations, with their ideas and beliefs, contributed to change the leaders' perspective. Consequently, by adopting the Prospect theory, what can be assumed is that it is true that groups are more extreme decision-makers since their decisions depend profoundly on the members' subjective desires and ideas.

Second, by considering Janis' (1972) theory about Groupthink, what can be stated is that one of his most important contributions in the book *Victims of Groupthink* regards the fact that he was able to give an appropriate explanation for all the case-studies that he examined. In particular, by analysing the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbor, what can be seen is that he focused on the decision-making process developed by the two most important groups during these crises: the ExComm and the Admiral Kimmel's group of advisers. Summarizing, Janis believes that, when a group follows the six criteria described in the previous paragraphs it manages to create a good decision-making process and, therefore, to avoid groupthink to develop. This was the case, for

example, of the Cuban Missile Crisis and, particularly, of the decisions taken by the ExComm. On the contrary, in 1941, both in the US and in Japan the six criteria were missing and, in fact, they were both affected by groupthink. Concerning the groups' tendency towards risk, what is relevant to highlight the fact that, in his book, Janis stated only that groups tend to be more risk-seeking than individuals, but he did it in a very general way. However, by comparing the two cases analysed in this thesis, what can be seen is that this is wrong. A probably more correct formulation of this theory could be that, on one side, groups who are affected by groupthink tend to be more risk-seeking while, on the other side, groups that manage to avoid the development of symptoms of groupthink are more risk-averse. In conclusion, what is relevant to underline is that, even though the groupthink theory was not born in order to explain the groups' tendency towards risk, it can be an approach that, if correctly developed, can be extremely useful in order to understand how governments behave in situations of uncertainty and why, at the end, they take risky or cautious decisions.

Finally, Allison's Three Model theory can be considered another valuable contribution in order to explain the risk-tendency of groups. In fact, by analysing all the three Models, what can be stated is that, in general, they all predict that groups can take either riskier or more cautious decisions compared to individuals. However, each Model explains this tendency taking into consideration different aspects: Model I the rationality of the government, Model II the routines developed by the organizations and Model III the bargaining games created by the individuals. In this sense, this theory, and particularly Model II and Model III, are really innovative since they consider aspects that are usually left aside. However, by looking at the analysis made by Allison regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis, what can be noted is that many weak points can be found. In particular, the most relevant one is the fact that it is very difficult to apply this theory, and in particular the principles stated in Models II and III, to international crises. In fact, even though from a theoretical point of view the principles created by Allison are right, these models are so complex that it is impossible to apply them separately. Particularly for what concerns Model III, what can be said is that too many aspects that should have been considered were left aside. This idea was sustained, for instance, by Bendor and Hammond (1992): indeed, they stated that 'the relations of so many variables in Model III are left so obscure that it is difficult to use the model even to explain the Cuban missile crisis' (page 318). Moreover, as it was stated during the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, what can be argued regarding Model II is that some of its assumptions, e.g., the fact that simple rules drive the organizations towards predictable and simple behaviours, are not completely right. This theory, in turn, was sustained even by Steiner (1977): indeed, she said that Allison's theory 'contain[s] basic and debilitating inconsistencies and contradictions' (page 390). Therefore, these can be seen even as the reasons why no literature today exists regarding the application of both Model II and Model III

to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Indeed, some scholars, like Russett, managed to apply to this international crisis only Model I, so the model that, according to Allison, was the most inadequate to explain the risk-tendency of groups for its being too simple. However, this does not mean that Allison's research is unimportant or useless; on the contrary, it still is one of the most interesting, peculiar and studied theories within political psychology. Despite this, some of its founding aspects should probably be revised.

In conclusion, what can be said is that the main result obtained in this chapter can be considered the confirmation of the fact that there are no evidences of the risky attitude of groups. Indeed, it is not true that groups take only riskier decisions compared to individuals: what can be said, on the contrary, is that groups are more extreme decision-makers both in a risky and cautious sense. This, in turn, was confirmed by all the three theory that were considered in this chapter which are, in general, among the most accredited theories developed during the years regarding the groups' attitude towards risk.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this thesis was to understand the behaviour that, in general, is developed by groups when it comes to take political decisions in moments of high international risk. In particular, the most relevant question was why, in some cases, governments take the riskiest decisions when dealing with international crises while, in other cases, they can manage to arrive even at cautious outcomes. Consequently, in order to understand this topic, two famous international crises have been chosen and analysed: the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Both have been turning points in history but what is interesting is that the methods applied by the governments involved to solve them were completely different.

The first result which was obtained thanks both to the analysis of the existing literature regarding this topic and the comparison between these two case-studies was the understanding of the fact that groups can be seen as more extreme decision-makers compared to individuals. Indeed, no support was found for the risky shift phenomenon proposed first by Stoner and then developed by Wallach, Kogan and Bem (1962, 1963). In fact, it was proved that individuals are able to produce both riskier and more cautious outcomes when they work in group. Moreover, what can be argued in this regard is that the shift in one direction or another is produced by the desires of each single member of the group itself: indeed, as Argote et al (1990) stated, 'groups amplify individual tendencies' (page 307). Consequently, groups reflect individuals' ideas and beliefs but even their biases and negative thoughts; all these elements, in turn, can have huge repercussions in the final outcome. This, for example, could be seen during the analysis of the attack on Pearl Harbor: the members of both the Japanese and the American administration, in fact, were biased against each other and this favoured the adoption of the riskiest solution. On the other hand, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the majority of the members of the ExComm were more worried about the possibility of having a nuclear attack in case of a harsh US reaction against the Soviet missiles in Cuba. Consequently, the decision to adopt a more cautious solution, so the imposition of a naval blockade and the attempts aimed at finding of a compromise with the Soviets, can be considered the result of the desires of the majority of Kennedy's advisers.

The second outcome of this thesis can be seen in the application of the Prospect theory and the Three Models theory to explain governmental decisions during two real international crises. Among these two theories, the second one turned out to be the most problematic: in fact, the three Models as they were explained by Allison, particularly the third one, are very vague and difficult to use to explain real cases. This assumption, in turn, is proved by the fact that, apart from Allison's research

regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis, no scholar managed to successfully apply Models II and III to other international crises. Only Model I, which is based on Von Neumann and Morgenstern's Expected Utility Theory, found a concrete application, for instance, in the explanation of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Consequently, even though the Prospect theory was not originally created to explain groups' attitude towards risk, it is the theory that, at the end, better fits the scope of this thesis. This, in fact, could be seen in the two attempts made by Whyte and Levi in 1994 and 1997 to apply the Prospect theory, respectively, to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbor. Indeed, their decision to consider the changes in the reference level proved to be a particularly powerful explanation for the final decisions promoted by the governments in moments of high risk. Furthermore, the ideas linked with the concepts of framing, loss aversion and domain of losses/gains are very interesting for the understanding of the consequent level of risk accepted by groups. Indeed, according to Kahneman and Tversky's original idea, groups tend to be risk seeking in domain of losses and risk averse in domain of gains. On one side, this relation between negative frame and the adoption of a risky decision could be clearly seen and confirmed during the attack on Pearl Harbor. However, on the other side, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, although the ExComm perceived the situation as a choice between a sure loss and a potential greater lost that entailed, in case of success, even some gains, they took a cautious decision. Consequently, in this second case the Prospect theory proved to be extremely interesting but only partially confirmed: in fact, it is important to remember that, although this relationship between negative frame and risky decision was not confirmed, Whyte and Levi's reasoning about the role of the reference level during this crisis proved to be correct. Moreover, another important aspect that could be seen in the two studies made by Whyte and Levi regards the fact that the importance of the emotions in the decision-making process of groups cannot be underestimated. In fact, it is the lack of consideration for this aspect the main reason why the Rational theory is not particularly helpful in the understanding of the groups' tendency towards risk.

Finally, the third important result obtained in this thesis regards the analysis and the application to real international crises of the main phenomena that, according to a number of scholars, have a role in producing either a risky or a cautious shift. As it was explained throughout this thesis, among them the most relevant ones are the choice shift, group polarization and groupthink theories. First of all, by considering the Cuban Missile Crisis and the attack on Pearl Harbor, what can be stated is that both the choice shift and the group polarization phenomena are valuable theories that, however, present weaknesses too. Indeed, neither of them could be successfully applied to the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In this sense, what can be noted is that the main problem of both these theories is probably the importance given to the group discussion in producing either the cautious or risky shift. In fact, their

main assumption consists in the fact that the final outcomes produced by groups always represent the alternative that was dominant before the group discussion. Said with other words, groups take decisions 'that are more extreme than, but in the same direction as, the initial tendencies manifested in population from which the groups are drawn' (McGuire et al, 1987, page 927). However, by looking at the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, what can be noted is that, although before the group discussion the majority of the members of the ExComm were willing to adopt the riskiest option, so the attack against Cuba, at the end they decided for the naval blockade. Consequently, what can be argued is that the final decision was not in the same direction of the initial tendency favoured by the majority of the members of the group. In fact, in this case, the group discussion created the opposite result. Finally, the third theory considered in this thesis was the one created by Janis in 1972 about groupthink. First of all, what is relevant to highlight about this theory is the fact that it was not originally developed to explain the risk tendency of groups but, ultimately, it proved to be extremely relevant even in this sense. In particular, the most powerful element of Janis' theory is the fact that he managed to explain why groups take decisions that sometimes are risky and sometimes cautious by describing the main elements that can have an impact in groups' performances during international crises and which are clearly summarized in Figure 4. However, the main problem linked with this theory regards the fact that, apart from the cases described by Janis in his book, it is very difficult to apply it to other crises. Indeed, all the scholars that tried to use the groupthink hypothesis in other case-studies have failed. Probably the problem of this theory can be seen in the fact that it is based on principles which are too vague and not so easy to measure. This could be easily noted, for example, in the description of the six criteria that, according to Janis, can have an impact in the quality of the final outcomes. Indeed, it is true that these criteria are elements that, if present, can contribute to improve the final decisions, but the problem is that they are easily questionable. This is proved by the fact that, during the analysis of the Cuban Missile Crisis, there were two different opinions about the presence/absence of these criteria in ExComm meetings. In fact, on one hand, Janis (1972) believed that the ExComm followed five out of six of these elements; on the other hand, Welch (1989) was sure that five of them were missing. Said with other words, it would have been better if this theory had been based on more concrete and measurable elements. In conclusion, what can be noted is that none of these three phenomena is a hundred percent reliable since that each of them has its strengths and weaknesses. However, they still are the three phenomena which obtained the highest support among scholars and that, in a high number of cases, proved to be correct.

Summarizing, what can be said is that the main contributions given by this study are three: first, it was possible to understand that, even though this is an argument which is largely ignored by a very

high number of scholars, knowing the groups' tendency towards risk is extremely relevant for its ability to alter, sometimes even in an extremely negative way, everyone's well-being. In fact, every day more, thanks even to the phenomenon of globalization, what can be seen is that there is an increase in the importance of the work made by groups. Nowadays, for example, be able to work in a profitable way within a team has become a fundamental prerequisite to find a job. Of course, the importance of groups can be seen not only at the micro level in moments of everyday life but even at the state level, where it has become even a founding principle of democracy. However, understanding the decision-making processes of governments is not as easy as Von Neumann and Morgenstern have predicted. Indeed, since groups are more complex actors compared to the single individuals, it follows that more complex theories should be considered to explain their decisions.

In fact, a second contribution of this thesis can be seen in the description of the major phenomena and theories useful to understand the risk-tendency of governments. All their major characteristics were presented and critically analysed and, at the end, what could be noted is that, for all of them, some weaknesses were found. Consequently, what can be said is that none of them is perfect but, probably, this is due to the fact that this is a 'volatile' topic which cannot be proved through mathematical calculations. Therefore, some assumptions of these theories are vague, difficult to measure and to apply. For this reason, what can be argued is that the best method to study this topic is through the analysis and the comparison of many different international crises in which the governments produced both risky and cautious final outcomes. In this way, it should be possible to see whether a common tendency exists and if there are particular elements which systematically push the groups toward a risky/cautious decision.

Finally, the third contribution, which can be derived especially from the comparison between the two case-studies, is the fact that the culture and the context play a fundamental role in influencing the final decisions. This could be seen especially in the analysis of the attack on Pearl Harbor: on one hand, in fact, Japanese values are completely different from the Western ones, particularly for what concerns the decision-making culture. On the other hand, it is worth to consider even the fact that, probably, the context of the Second World War had a role in pushing both the Japanese and the Americans towards the riskiest option. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, on the contrary, these differences were not so marked. In fact, even though many Soviet values at that time were completely different from the Western ones, what can be said is that their culture was (and still is) more similar to the US one than to the Japanese one. Moreover, for what concerns the context, it is true that, in 1962, they were in the middle of the period of bipolarism, but both the superpowers knew the risks linked with a nuclear war and, consequently, neither of them ever aimed at starting one. In fact, what

can be easily seen is that the fear linked with this threat was so high that no direct war ever began between the Soviet Union and the United States. This fear, therefore, can be considered as an extremely powerful element that pushed both these countries towards the adoption of more cautious solutions.

In conclusion, what can be said is that it would be interesting if more studies were conducted on this topic. In particular, new and different perspectives should be taken into consideration and more real international crises analysed in order to be able to find some trends in the decision-making process developed by national governments. Obtaining this result, in turn, would be extremely useful for the understanding of the elements that can influence the final outcomes and, thus, for the adoption of the adequate measures both to improve governmental decisions and to avoid bad decisions to be taken. Moreover, in this way it would be possible even to foresee how future crises will develop and, therefore, governments could be stopped from doing something risky and dangerous. However, in order to reach this purpose, a second important aspect to be considered regards the fact that more researches whose goal is to try to put the theory into practice should be conducted. In this sense, what can be argued is that, for future studies, it would be interesting if scholars decided even to use a different approach: instead of creating first the theory and then trying to put it into practice, they can look first at the practice and then create a theory which includes assumptions derived from the results obtained. In fact, what can be argued is that a theory which is created starting from a critical observation of the phenomena under evaluation is more complete and probably easier to apply. Moreover, since it is the theory that obtained the most relevant results in this thesis, it would be interesting to have the possibility to examine more international crises adopting the Prospect theory. In this way, it would be possible to understand whether this theory can be successfully applied to explain not only the individuals' but also groups' tendencies towards risk. Finally, the last element that is worth to take into consideration for future studies concerns inclusiveness. In fact, the great majority of the theories, phenomena and ideas presented in this thesis were created by scholars that tried to describe the groups' behaviour by looking only at the US. Only few of them considered different countries and ethnicities. However, in order to create more valuable theories, this aspect is one of the most important. Resuming, what can be argued is that this is a very interesting topic which, however, still needs a lot of researches in order to be improved.



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